

IDENTIFYING THE CULTURAL ESSENTIAL LEARNING (CELS) USED BY CREE
TEACHERS IN LITERACY CLASSES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF SASKATOON

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ABSTRACT

Previous researchers in the education field have studied First Nations values and traditions as a means of incorporating First Nations heritage into Canadian education. Pedagogies and lesson plans developed for First Nations students provide ways of integrating their cultures in schools. Nevertheless, only a few studies have researched how elementary First Nations teachers who instruct literacy classes comprehend and develop First Nations values and traditions in their classrooms. Thus, the purpose of the current research is to understand how Cree teachers from elementary schools who instruct literacy classes in Saskatoon, where is located in the treaty six territory, integrate and promote elements from Cultural Essential Learnings (CELs). Moreover, this research study includes other Cree traditions and values that those teachers also develop on their lessons plans in order to work with their students. Seeking to increase the body of knowledge within this field, this program of study is guided by the following lines of inquiry: (a) what examples of First Nations Cultural Essential Learnings appear in the repertoires of four Cree teachers who instruct literacy classes in an urban school setting? (b) are there other elements of Cree values and culture that emerge in their teaching? This study is framed by a generic qualitative research within a constructivist framework. Semi-structured interviews with elementary Cree teachers were used to collect the data, and thematic analysis was used to interpret the data. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit four self-declared First Nations elementary literacy teachers in Saskatoon. The results of this research study showed that these participants incorporate Cree values and traditions in their lesson plans. The teachers that participated in this study embrace the tipi teachings from the Cree culture, which are in part related to CELs, as well as other cultural information to foster Indigenous cultures and traditions in their classrooms.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this research is to understand how Cree teachers from elementary schools who instruct literacy classes in Saskatoon, where is located in the treaty six territory, integrate and promote elements from Cultural Essential Learnings (CELs). Furthermore, this research study includes other Cree traditions and values that those teachers might also develop on their lesson plans in order to work successfully not only with First Nations students, but with all students. Aikenhead (2001) affirmed that when students learn through methods that respect their cultural backgrounds and feel that their traditions and values are being integrated in classrooms, students can become open-minded to learning about different cultural approaches. All students can learn by negotiating and accepting the exploration of the same subject, such as science, through different cultural approaches. According to Aikenhead (2001), this kind of negotiation is called cross-cultural education, in which all students' cultures are taken into consideration and all students can learn from each others' cultures. A cross-cultural education might lead to the development of students' cultural identities and self-esteem.

I have always been interested in research topics related to culture and education. The main focus of my first master's degree in Philosophy of Education examined in Brazil the relationship between our globalized culture and individual development. My thesis (Baiochi, 2009) argued that the modern era of technological abundance and immediate gratification has negatively affected the formation of individuality, defined as a person's capacity to develop autonomy and self-determination. In theory, the seemingly unlimited access to information should nurture our creativity and ambition, but in practice, it has blocked our imagination and clouded our judgment.

Education and culture play crucial roles in shaping individuals' personalities as long as

these individuals feel they are essential contributors to the society to which they belong (Baiochi, 2009). It appears that the principles and beliefs of European colonization dominate in Canada and that they often overrule First Nations values and traditions (Battiste, 2002). Therefore, it may be that the educational system in Canada relies on Western curricula and that First Nations values and traditions are, consequently, delegated to a secondary position of importance.

According to the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre (2009), the predominant legacies of European colonization for First Nations consist of poverty, domestic violence, and alcohol, drug, and other chemical addictions for Indigenous peoples. First Nations peoples' education has been negatively impacted in the sense that their values have been largely ignored or denied. Therefore, some changes must be implemented with regard to the education of not only First Nations children, but also all kids. I believe that lesson plans prepared based on First Nations' cultural concerns can positively impact students' attitudes, behaviours and life choices within Canadian social contexts.

First Nations culture has been regarded as inferior to Western culture since the colonization period (Battiste, 2002). As a consequence, First Nations culture and traditions have been neglected or considered irrelevant in educational contexts. Battiste claimed that because the values and customs of First Nations students have been abandoned, these students still confront racism and ethnocentrism in their classrooms since the educational curricula are based on Eurocentric principles. According to Battiste, "Eurocentric education policies and attempts at assimilation have contributed to major global losses in Indigenous languages and knowledge and to persistent poverty among Indigenous peoples" (2013, p. 25). My stance on education is that Canadian educational structure needs to truly embrace First Nations heritage. First Nations should be faithfully included into Canadian society and their respective cultures and customs

should be valued by the mainstream Canadian society. I have thus designed this research to explore how this might occur.

It is important to acknowledge that some educational and social projects have been developed in Saskatchewan to include and embrace Indigenous cultures in Canadian social contexts. For example, a project called “Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Metis People” which involves the collaboration between the Joint Task Force (JTF) and a research team from the Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit at the University of Saskatchewan. This objectives of this project to improve educational outcomes and employment rates for Indigenous peoples in Saskatchewan by developing strategic plans such as integrating Indigenous languages and culture into curriculum (Pelletier, Cottrell, & Hardie, 2013).

Another Indigenous inclusive project developed by the Ministry of Education of Saskatchewan in 2010 is named “A Time for Significant Leadership: A Strategy for Implementing Nations and Metis Education Goals (ATFSL)”. This project contains educational tools for school divisions to promote capacity building and leadership within their own staff to support an education system focused on First Nations and Metis ways of knowledge. It is a project that ensures the inclusion of Indigenous cultures by school staff in the school divisions of Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Learning, 2010).

The key concepts in this study are part of the CELs which incorporate First Nations traditions and values. Before defining the components of Cultural Essential Learnings, it is important to understand the concept of culture for First Nations peoples. Culture is a shared comprehension of rules, politics, ceremonies, and languages of each First Nations peoples, and the heritage and uniqueness of each First Nations tribe are based on their languages and their

cultures (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009). Another fundamental concept that should be addressed for clarification in this research study is the Common Essential Learnings (CELs) that were previously integrated into curriculum by Saskatchewan Education. These Common Essential Learnings refer to six interrelated areas, which include values, skills and processes considered fundamental as foundations for learning in all school subjects. The primary purpose of the CELs was to guide content and instruction that would give students an integrated and meaningful knowledge base as well as the processes necessary to accomplish personal autonomy. They were developed in part from *Saskatchewan's Goals of Education* in 1984 (Saskatchewan Education, 1988) and are not related to the present-day concept of CELs which will be further explained and used in this research study.

Differentiating between adaptations in the forms of accommodation and modification is fundamental for the contextualization of this study. Accommodation is a concept that will be used in the context of education during this study, including adaptations of lesson plans in order to incorporate First Nations CELs and other core values and traditions. According to the *Saskatchewan Educational Curriculum* (Saskatchewan Education, 1992), adaptations in the form of accommodations refer to adjustments made in educational programs to accommodate diversity in students' learning needs. These adjustments include practices taken by teachers to make curricula, instruction, and learning environments more meaningful for each student. By doing this, teachers will not only address students' learning needs but their cultural needs as well. It is important to note that variables are adjusted to achieve the established curricular objectives without modifying the initial objectives of the approved curriculum. Accommodations to and within lesson plans are instructional adaptations and are designed to change the manner in which information is presented to target student needs (Crawford, 2010). However, modifications are

decisions made to accommodate a student's educational needs in order to achieve individualized learning goals which are different from the learning objectives of a course. Therefore, modifications are made for students whose special needs do not allow them to achieve the goals in the curriculum. For instance, these students would follow the curriculum of lower grade levels through modifications that would address their learning needs (British Columbia Education, 2009).

The Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre (2009) defined CELs as the main components of First Nations' cultures including, but not limited to, relationships (kinship), respect (values), sharing, ultimate protection, love, obedience, humility, thankfulness, and strength. These components are further defined in Appendix A.

Genuine teacher-student relationships are fundamental to First Nations in the sense that building authentic, trusting bonds gives purpose and leads to a sense of belonging to the community (Saskatchewan Indian Culture Centre, 2009). First Nations value the respect shown to Elders as they are recognized as having the knowledge and the understanding of the community's culture, including spiritual and social traditions.

The Elders impart their knowledge to the younger members of their communities through the story-telling tradition. Sharing is another value among First Nations peoples and allows them to help the members of their communities with basic needs. First Nations have the responsibility within their communities to seek and embrace behaviours that promote the balance of their bodies, minds, emotions and spirits (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009). These components encompass and shape First Nations' ways of learning and interacting with their world. According to Kovach (2012), there are some words that are associated with Indigenous epistemologies such as interactional, broad-based, whole, inclusive, animate, cyclical, fluid, and

spiritual. The author adds that tribal knowledge is also pragmatic, ceremonial, physical and metaphysical.

First Nations epistemologies focus on their non-fragmented and holistic nature, on the metaphysical and pragmatic ways of relating to their realities, on relationships and values, and on language and place (Kovach, 2012). Kovach affirms that the relational aspect of First Nations cultures is what binds them. These First Nations epistemologies, traditions, and values are the fundamentals of the main components of CELs and will guide the data analysis of this study.

The CELs described by Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre (2009) are the fundamentals of values and principles that allow the development of a culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy (McCarty et al., 2014). This concept recognizes all students are diverse and learn in ways which are connected to their cultural backgrounds (language, norms, values, and traditions) and which lead to the formation of their cultural identities (Western Canadian Protocol Framework, 2000).

The CELs embraces accommodations in lessons plans that are culturally bound by First Nations traditions and values. Lessons plans that are adapted in order to be inclusive of First Nations cultures represent one method of promoting culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy. This kind of pedagogy requires that teachers develop and implement lesson plans that are responsive and relevant to First Nations cultural experiences in which language, respect, reciprocity, caring relationships, and responsibility can lead to the transformation of Canadian education into a holistic model based on the four dimensions of First Nations culture - spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual (McCarty & Lee, 2014).

This study explored how four elementary Cree teachers incorporate CELs into their lesson plans, and which additional expressions of First Nations values and cultures are included.

To explore these questions, this study used a basic qualitative approach anchored in a constructivist framework (Merriam, 2002).

The method used for this study consisted of semi-structured interviews with four elementary Cree teachers. The process of interviewing these teachers enabled the possibility of leading them to gain insight on how they are incorporating Cree traditions and values into their lesson plans. This consideration of their daily practices with their students might have empowered the participating teachers who could have further identified and developed culturally responsive strategies. Educators can use these culturally responsive strategies to avoid the teaching practices that might lead to, but are not limited to, racism, intolerance, exclusion, discrimination, and lack of respect towards Indigenous cultures. The process of interviewing these teachers could have also made the participants aware of additional elements of Cree values and culture that might be included in classrooms. The reflection on daily practices in schools might be expanded not only to First Nations teachers, but also to other elementary teachers who could embrace First Nations cultures to benefit students. Under these circumstances, a generic qualitative study within the constructivist framework is appropriate for the scope of such a project. According to Battiste (2013), there are still significant challenges associated with creating an inclusive, culturally responsive, and anti-oppressive educational environment. Therefore, Canadian schools should confront the hidden ideology of racism, colonialism, and cultural and linguistic imperialism that still exist in the curricula.

The literature review in Chapter Two examines the consequences of the colonization period for First Nations cultures, identities and education. Moreover, the review approaches the main tenets of CELs as the fundamentals of First Nations education and their expansion into lesson plans. In addition to the main concepts of Cultural Essential Learnings, also presented are

other examples of Indigenous cultures and knowledge, as well as examples of culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogies in classrooms based on the Saskatchewan Curriculum. Chapter Three follows with the methodology and explains the research strategy. Chapter Four presents the categorization of the data collected. Chapter Five analysis and concludes the findings of the study and offers some reflections.

Research Questions

Previous research studies have demonstrated the importance of adapting curricula and lesson plans in classrooms in order to appreciate and integrate First Nations cultures into Canadian education. However, minimal research has been completed on how First Nations elementary teachers who instruct literacy in Saskatoon, where is located in the treaty six territory, understand and develop First Nations values and traditions in their lesson plans that might benefit all students. Therefore, in an effort to increase the body of knowledge within this field, this program of study will be guided by the following lines of inquiry: (a) what examples of First Nations Cultural Essential Learnings (CELs) appear in the repertoires of four Cree teachers who instruct literacy classes in an urban school setting? (b) are there other elements of Cree values and culture that emerge in their teaching?

Limitations

The fact that the data collection only relied on interview data is a limitation of this study. Classroom observations were part of the initial study plan to serve as an additional source of information; however, this had to be excluded to attract more participants interested in this research study. Thus, the researcher could not triangulate the data to test the consistency of data points from various sources.

Another limitation of this study was that it included only one school. This limited the variety of teachers' experiences that could have been encountered if other schools had participated. Additionally, the participants were from a Cree program that has a preexisting curriculum that needs to be followed, which might have positively influenced the existence of Cree pedagogies, values and traditions in the classroom of the participating teachers. Moreover, the participants all had a Cree background. Although this enriched the data as they brought teaching experiences embedded in their cultural background, it would be interesting to investigate if other Canadian teachers are also exercising culturally responsiveness in the classroom.

Only one cultural group (Cree teachers) was investigated, which means that the exploration of inclusive methods in the education field are bound by culture-specific elements. It is not a study that encompasses other cultural groups, or specific groups within First Nations cultures because even among First Nations peoples, there are different cultural codes. The data must be interpreted with caution as the First Nations discussed in this study mainly refers to Cree people only.

Finally, the interpretation of the data was influenced by the researcher's different cultural background and values, which are not from a First Nations origin. However, an effort was made to acknowledge the potential of research biases. For instance, the researcher wrote a reflective journal to be aware of potential conflicts between the meaning of the data and personal judgments. Consultation with important First Nations figures, such as an Elder, for orientation was also used as a means to help interpret the data in a culturally respectful and responsive manner.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter focuses on the literature review of the present study (see Appendix B for a conceptual framework of the CELs). First, the negative impact on First Nations cultures, languages and education during the colonization period will be presented. Second, examples of Indigenous knowledge will be offered. Then, the importance of culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy for First Nations students in the education field, and its relation to the concept of CELs (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009) will be shown. Next, the connection between culturally relevant pedagogies and First Nations languages being taught in literacy classes will be presented. Then, an introduction of the Saskatchewan Curriculum and the changes over time to the national and local educational contexts with regards to First Nations, Inuit and Métis (FNIM) content and perspectives will be shown. Finally, a model of CELs implementation into classrooms will be presented.

The Effects of Colonization on Indigenous Peoples in Canada

Colonization in Canada in the 1800s, from an Indigenous perspective, was seen as oppressive, occupational, expulsive and was devastating for Indigenous peoples as it resulted in racism and systematic discrimination (Goulet & Goulet, 2014). The ideologies of Eurocentrism during the period of colonization, rooted in racism, caused Indigenous peoples to be seen by Europeans as inferior, wild, without property and without law. Europeans considered themselves to be culturally superior and believed they could educate Indigenous peoples according to European values and traditions. As a consequence, colonization has affected Indigenous peoples economically, politically, emotionally, spiritually, and educationally in all social and cultural dimensions (Goulet & Goulet, 2014).

Haig-Brown (1988) described the initial encounters between Europeans and Indigenous peoples in the 1800s in Canada. The earliest encounters were limited to itinerant fur traders that had minimal effect on the lifestyle of Indigenous peoples. As the demands of European markets increased, the presence of Europeans on Indigenous peoples' lands intensified, and as a result, Europeans wanted to integrate Indigenous peoples into their cultures. Europeans wanted to Christianise and civilize Indigenous peoples. In the mid-1800s, a federal policy allowing schools to educate Indigenous children in the "superior" European traditions and values was enacted. Indigenous children were isolated from their parents and introduced to the Christian religion. In the late 1800s, school was in session daily, and by 1920, the attendance of Indigenous children in residential schools was compulsory. The author added that the governments had the missionaries to control Indigenous peoples by limiting their movements and making them abandon their culture.

In Indigenous communities, education was treated as a responsibility shared by families and communities, and only at puberty were children removed from their communities. Their education was transmitted orally by Elders and was an ongoing process focusing on the whole community and not simply limited to young people. In residential schools, children were removed from their communities, placed in large groups and forced to follow restrictive schedules (Haig-Brown, 1988).

McMillan (1988) also contributed to the discussion on the losses Indigenous peoples suffered during the colonization period in Canada through the detailed explanation of the Indian Act of 1876. According to the author, the Indian Act had a variety of discriminatory elements that contributed to the deterioration of the Indigenous identity. For example, the Indian feast system, or potlatch, a ceremonial banquet and celebration, was officially prohibited by the

federal government in 1885. Although the law was often unheeded or circumvented by the Indigenous community, the formal prohibition lasted until 1951.

During the colonization period, not only were Indigenous cultures and traditions affected by Europeans, but the Indigenous population of Canada decreased. Daschuk (2013) noted the decline of Indigenous peoples in Canada in the plains as a consequence of the colonization period. There was a high mortality of Indigenous peoples in the plains due to the smallpox epidemic in the early 1780s. In the years following the epidemic, trade between Canadians and Indigenous peoples remained under strict Canadian control. Many Indigenous traders were undermined and otherwise poorly treated. The competition among Canadian traders to acquire fur obtained by Indigenous people led to widespread violence and substance abuse among the Indigenous communities.

Haig-Brown (1988) touched on the loss of Indigenous languages within residential schools. Languages are the central aspect of cultures. Indigenous languages were routinely prohibited in residential schools, while English became the dominant language spoken. The ban on Indigenous languages was initiated on the first day of school and students who did not cooperate were punished. Children were expected to learn English in the classroom and Latin in church. Europeans wanted children to develop their character in accordance with the doctrines of Christianity. The Catholic religion had a profoundly negative effect on those students who clung to their own spiritual customs. The comparatively severe notions conveyed by and through Christian education, including evil, sin, guilt, and eternal damnation were devastating to those children who had known a comparatively gentler approach to religion and spirituality (Haig-Brown, 1988).

Europeans imposed a foreign language on Indigenous peoples and an ideology that was fundamentally dissimilar to the established Indigenous cultures. Colonial Indigenous schooling through residential and industrial schools had a tremendous and negative impact on Indigenous peoples (Goulet & Goulet, 2014). Children were separated from their families and were taught that the cultural and spiritual beliefs and practices of their families and communities were pagan. Thus, this process of colonization resulted in substantial suffering and caused students to question or lose their cultural identities and connections with their known world. Consequently, ethnocentrism and racism remain in Canadian schools, and inequity, unequal power relations, competitive individualism and low levels of academic achievement among Indigenous peoples can still be observed today (Goulet & Goulet, 2014).

As Battiste (2013) affirmed, even though educational institutions in Canada are under pressure to make education culturally relevant to Indigenous peoples, the modern system is still based on the English linguistic imperialism. Residential schools, through the attempted assimilation of Indigenous cultures into the Eurocentric ideology, have contributed to major losses in Indigenous knowledge and language, and the assimilation practice is still present in the educational systems across Canada.

Battiste (2013) emphasized that some modern educational curricula are still not reflective of Indigenous heritage, knowledge or culture. However, there are schools in Canada in which part of their curricula is based on cultural responsiveness. This literature review will present some examples of culturally sustaining pedagogies in Canadian schools, specifically in Saskatchewan.

The standardization of curricula tends to contribute to the disintegration of cultural traditions (Battiste, 2013). Battiste argued that the manner in which the current system of

education defines diversity and inclusion is sometimes incongruent with diversified and inclusive education practices. For example, some teachers might blame Indigenous students when they fail in schools, rather than taking into consideration the fact that Eurocentric assumptions of power and privilege operate within the educational systems.

Battiste (2002) claimed that when it comes to education at Canadian universities, even though many of them are working towards implementing culturally bound curricula, some institutions have not offered comprehensive teacher training regarding the legal, political and cultural foundations of the Aboriginal peoples.

Battiste (2013) asserted that education is a culturally and socially constructed institution, and those who are in power define its purposes. Thus, more often than not, the constructed educational principles have not been comprehensive or beneficial to all population in Canada. The author said that education in Canada is patriarchal and complacent with oppression of women, sometimes men, minorities, children, and Indigenous peoples.

Battiste (2013) upholds the notion that the educational system in Canada has led to cognitive imperialism, in which the majority of educational curricula and pedagogy are built on the Canadian knowledge, thought, language, values, discourses, texts, and methods. Cognitive imperialism has led to European superiority over other peoples and epistemologies. As a consequence, Eurocentric science has become officially standardized. During the colonization process, First Nations peoples and other nations have been excluded from the predominantly European way of thinking. Eurocentric culture and the recognition of only one valid way of thinking have resulted in the exclusion of Indigenous traditions (Battiste, 2013).

Furthermore, Battiste (2013) claimed that cultural racism is also a result of Eurocentric superiority and values, which has led to “First Nations students experiencing education as

meaningless, leaving school early, profound psychological scars and eventually to racial and cultural genocide” (Battiste, 2013, p. 97). Thus, it is essential to reform or modify colonization-era education into a more inclusive system in which Indigenous peoples can be in command of their own education. First Nations peoples have different methods of learning, knowing and existing that should be acknowledged and incorporated into all Canadian schools.

Examples of Indigenous Knowledge

The relationship between science and nature from the Eurocentric perspective is different from that of Indigenous peoples. Eurocentric science is driven by the principles of inquiry about nature and natural phenomenon (Battiste, 2013) and is founded in empirical and measurable experiments in which objectivity is crucial. However, Indigenous comprehension of science is based on direct contact with their environment, the people that surround them, and nature itself.

Thus, the root of Indigenous knowledge lies within relationships with nature, where people build their awareness and their strategies for living. The ongoing relationship with nature allows us to look at our communities as a system of patterns that generate specific cultural values and ways of knowing. The latter, for example, originated from Indigenous relationships within the tribe, the relationships with other living creatures, the relationships with their land and finally, the relationships with the spirit. This knowledge can be observed in social forms and processes such as in symbolic and creative manifestations, technologies, stories, ways of being and learning, ceremonies, and traditions that differ essentially and dramatically from the European approach (Battiste, 2013).

Goulet and Goulet (2014) further contributed to our understanding of the ways in which Indigenous peoples see their world from a more holistic perspective than Europeans do. For Indigenous peoples, the relationships (kinship) with other members of their communities, the

land, and nature itself, are the basis of their learning process. Thus, teaching for Indigenous peoples should consider the importance of relationships and connections, for example, “relationships between the teacher and student, among students in the class, and connections to the content and process of learning” (Goulet & Goulet, 2014, p. 78). By developing close and heartfelt relationships with Indigenous students, teachers could bring into the classrooms a pedagogy which is culturally oriented to an Indigenous perspective of being in the world. Goulet and Goulet (2014) refer to the four subcategories that are the foundations of developing positive relationships with Indigenous students: being close and developing personal bonds; appraising them as individuals within their cultures; believing in their capacities; and building reciprocal respect and trust.

Hingley (2014) also stated that Indigenous knowledge is based on a holistic way of learning, in which the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual dimensions are part of Indigenous cultures and knowledge. Additionally, Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005) affirmed that Indigenous peoples have unique ways of observing and relating to the world, the universe, and each other. Their traditional education was founded in observing natural processes, adapting to ways of survival, obtaining food from the plant and animal world, and using materials from nature to make their tools. All of these were learned through demonstration and observation accompanied by reflective stories told by Elders. Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005) differentiated science and education between Western society and Indigenous peoples by saying that:

Although Western science and education tend to emphasize compartmentalized knowledge that is often decontextualized and taught in the detached setting of a classroom or laboratory, Indigenous people have traditionally acquired their knowledge through direct experience in the natural world. For them, the particulars come to be

understood in relation to the whole, and the "laws" are continually tested in the context of everyday survival (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005, p.11).

Barnhardt & Kawagley (2005) believed that Indigenous students could better learn aspects of science such as the explanations of natural phenomena if these subjects were related in Indigenous terms. For example, teachers could choose an eddy along the river for placing fishing nets, point out the currents, movement of sediment in the water, the likely path of the fish, the condition of the river bank, and so on. When Indigenous students understand the relevance of the knowledge, its significance can subsequently be explained in Western terms, such as flow, velocity, resistance, turbidity, and so on. This example illustrates how the Westernized modern explanation can be aligned to the traditional Indigenous knowledge.

First Nations cultures are essentially spiritual cultures. Through songs, ceremonies and languages, people are given opportunities to be reminded that they are alive and have a purpose on Earth. Children begin learning by observing and playing. They are then included in activities, such as the gathering and harvesting of traditional food and medicinal plants. Children begin embracing their cultural identity by using their five senses (smell, touch, taste, sight, and hearing) as well as their observational skills (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009).

CELs as a Culturally Sustaining/Revitalizing Pedagogy

Based on First Nations education and culture, the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre (2009) developed the CELs as a comprehensive and general model of First Nations traditions and values, which could inform and guide First Nations teachers. The CELs embrace First Nations cultural customs and ideals, which can be integrated by First Nations teachers into their lesson plans. These traditions and values include relationships (kinship), respect (values), sharing, ultimate protection, love, obedience, humility, thankfulness, and strength. These components are

further defined in Appendix A (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009). Based on the affirmations on this paragraph, it can be said that there is a close relation between the concept of CELs and culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy (CSR/P). This pedagogy suggests approaching Indigenous education in a manner that is responsive to Indigenous cultural experiences (McCarty & Lee, 2014), in which the wholeness element (spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual) of Indigenous culture is present (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009).

Ladson-Billings (1995) affirmed that culturally relevant pedagogy is a way to maintain and respect students' cultural integrity in schools. Culturally relevant teaching is accomplished by three broad conceptions regarding self and other, social relations, and knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Teachers should include in their daily practices students' cultural perspectives. For instance, developing relationships (kinship) through First Nations cultural perspectives and CELs might have a positive impact on Indigenous academic lives. The main attributes of bonding with Indigenous students are being open, generous, and genuinely caring toward them. Teachers who demonstrate respect for Indigenous students and their culture can help their students feel valued and included, and, as a consequence, students are more likely to engage actively in the classroom learning process (Goulet & Goulet, 2014). Building positive relationships might include teachers adapting their lesson plans to better attend to Indigenous students' needs. By nurturing and building respectful and trusting relationships with their Indigenous students, teachers ultimately become more engaged and feel greater responsibility to change the status quo in Canadian education (Kovatch, 2012). As this author affirms, responsibility results in knowledge and action, which seeks to serve others in a genuine way, along with respect and reciprocity.

Language represents another essential aspect of Indigenous cultures. Through language, children can fully understand that their culture is a way of life. The primary way to gain traditional knowledge is through hands-on learning and listening to oral histories. Learning traditional culture requires children and individuals to take time to sit and visit with Elders and knowledge keepers (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009).

The CELs developed by the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre represent a culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy. Thus, the incorporation of CELs into lesson plans can go beyond the process of simply incorporating cultural content. The manner in which CELs are integrated into lesson plans is crucial to transform standard pedagogies into sustaining/revitalizing ones. As mentioned previously, building reliable, honest and close relationships with First Nations students is a positive and productive way to incorporate CELs into classrooms (Goulet & Goulet, 2014). Additionally, teaching First Nations content through their own languages can make the culturally sustaining/revitalizing practice more meaningful to Indigenous students (McCarty & Lee, 2014).

Connections between Culturally Relevant Pedagogies and Literacy Learning

Nikkel (2006) showed that due to various assimilating factors brought by the residential schools in Canada, as well as the urbanization process and exposure to English, Indigenous children living in Canada are less and less likely to speak their mother tongue. The author affirms that Indigenous peoples, especially in urban centres, are much less likely to speak Indigenous language at home than those living on reserves or rural areas. As a result, very few Indigenous children learn to speak their First Nations languages fluently at home. Therefore, as the author affirms, the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous languages did not occur as in the past, when speaking a mother tongue at home was supported by Indigenous communities.

The author argues that preserving Indigenous languages is a concern that needs to be addressed by developing Indigenous language immersion programs in schools.

The incorporation of Indigenous languages into lesson plans is another fundamental part of the culturally sustaining/revitalizing approach. In terms of Indigenous cultural continuity, the usage of their languages to connect to everyday and sacred knowledge is vital and enables Indigenous students to strengthen their cultural identities. In order to teach Indigenous languages as part of a culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy, the connections among CELs, language and identity should be made (McCarty & Lee, 2014). The use of Indigenous languages in the classroom has to be tied to Indigenous cultures in order to become meaningful. As Savage et al. (2011) affirmed, the classroom is the lived experience of students, which takes place every day in their lives. Therefore, validating First Nations cultural identities, and valuing their cultural knowledge by teaching school content through First Nations languages, has the potential to make a difference in their lives as students and citizens.

Sterzuk (2010) argued that teaching Indigenous content through English language reinforces the status quo by implying that the English language is regarded as better, more common and preferred, and that, in fact, imposes the ideology of British imperialism, essentially homogenizing all cultures. Providing students with access to a variety of languages, such as the Indigenous languages, might reverse the standardization of English and, furthermore, bring about the end of discriminatory school practices.

Antone (2003) stressed the importance of literacy as taught from an Aboriginal perspective of a holistic worldview. The mental, emotional, physical and spiritual aspects of Indigenous relationships to the Creator and the environment represent Aboriginal literacy. According to the author, Aboriginal literacy practitioners affirmed that literacy is part of

everyday life, since it involves relationships between self, community, and creation that require the skills of speaking, listening, and comprehension.

Antone (2003) claimed that Indigenous cultural elements such as healing, determination of identity, and language play a major role when it comes to Aboriginal literacy as it is more than just the development of skills used in the reading and writing process. For Indigenous peoples, learning has to be connected not only with academic growth, but also with spiritual, physical, and emotional development.

Sperling & Appleman (2011) investigated the qualities of student writing when expressing themselves in writing tasks. When students voiced themselves in their writings, they brought along their cultural and social contexts. From a linguistic perspective, the notion of voice as an individual accomplishment is investigated in studies that focus on both spoken and written expression. The authors emphasized that student voices are shaped by social and cultural factors. Successful expression is result of a social and cultural mediation that reflect positively on students' narratives if those cultural elements can be incorporated and articulated.

Giroux (2010) emphasized Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy in the sense that his theory focuses on the contributions of literacy for students when those students are encouraged to relate their personal values and experiences to their learning experiences. Thus, the input of personal experience becomes validated, since students relate their own narratives, social relations, and histories to what is being taught, and as a result, they make sense of their own learning experiences (Giroux, 2010).

Smith and McLaren (2010) affirmed that the critical pedagogy of Freire can be expanded to Indigenous contexts when it comes to recognizing the importance of their way of learning. The authors discussed the critical pedagogy of Freire as a tool to promote a decolonizing

pedagogy by seeking to consider and revitalize Indigenous epistemologies in classrooms. Smith and McLaren (2010) promoted education that is emancipatory for minority groups, such as Indigenous peoples, whereby their own traditional elements are used as part of their education. Indigenous peoples should collaborate with the dominant society in their own education and become active agents in writing their own histories and in reinventing a different narrative. Through this perspective, Indigenous knowledge and experiences become the guiding texts and discourses in educational contexts (Smith & McLaren, 2010).

McIntosh et al. (2011) stated that in order to promote cultural responsiveness, Indigenous approaches to learning must be incorporated into teaching practices. When doing so, oral narrative or storytelling must be included as well as inviting community elders into the classroom. Furthermore, cultural responsiveness can be also promoted through the revitalization of native languages by teaching Indigenous languages as second languages. The authors affirmed that self-esteem and cultural identity are enhanced when Indigenous peoples develop fluency in their languages, which allows them to connect and participate within their communities. Additionally, culturally responsive instruction enhances student success by honouring their diverse culture, heritage, experiences, and language.

Leavitt (1994) argued that when life history, whether spoken or written, is included in the contexts of learning and teaching, it can bring academic success for Indigenous students. Students might feel empowered when their traditions are put into perspective during their educational process. The inclusion of Indigenous languages in curricula and lesson plans could capture the true meanings of Indigenous words connected to their culture. This increases the relevance and power of the material and, consequently, more fully and dynamically transmits the essence of traditions and values to Indigenous students. For instance, some Indigenous words

give life to natural forces (e.g. sun, lands, plants, rocks, animals, people, etc.), which lose their essence when translated into English (Goulet & Goulet, 2014).

Saskatchewan Curriculum: What Changes Over Time have been made to the Local Educational Context Regarding FNIM Content and Perspectives?

According to Saskatoon Public Schools (SPS), learning is enhanced in a culturally responsive environment. It considers the inclusion of culture, beliefs and practices of First Nations peoples as fundamental to the educational process for administrators, teachers and pupils. An SPS advisory committee, consisting of advocates who have protected and promoted First Nations and Métis culture, met several times and defined cultural responsiveness as follows:

Affirming: Honors First Nation and Métis knowledge, ways of knowing, doing and being.

Honoring: Elders and traditional knowledge keepers are the foundation for the transmission and continuation of culture. They become the foundation and the center of our work.

Holistic: Engages the heart, mind, body and spirit of all learners and recognizes the gifts and strengths of all students and grows and nurtures those gifts.

Ceremonial: Ceremonies nurture the spirit and offers guidance in personal development and self-awareness. Ceremonies promote pride in nationhood, community, family and the individual; fosters family togetherness and a spirit of community pride as the community witnesses and celebrates the achievement of individuals.

Healing: Schools become centers for cultural continuity. Language, learning from

place, traditional songs all reinforce pride in who you are as a person.

Value Based: Respect, balance, integrity, belonging, compassion, forgiveness, generosity, responsibility and wisdom are the values that shape relationships and guide teaching and learning.

Symbolic: Schools are welcoming and create a feeling of pride. Artwork, place names, symbols and other visuals represent cultural beliefs and values.

Purposeful: Creates a stronger sense of personal self-worth and connection to community.

Community based: A true partnership between child, family, school (all adults in the building and the system that is in place) and community exists.

Inclusive: School is a place that nurtures the spirit of belonging. Belonging is about caring, connection and the belief that all are equally valid and needed for the community to be strong.

Respectful of Cultural Diversity: All cultures should be validated, recognized and honoured. The cultural knowledge of the Swampy, Plains and Woodland Cree, Nakawé, Lakota, Dakota, Nakota, Dene and Métis people must be honoured as the distinct Nations that they are. There is a place for all in the Circle.

Celebration of Life: Prayer, Ceremony and Thanksgiving show appreciation to the Creator and to those who walked before us (2008, pp. 13-14).

Based on the comprehensive conceptualization of cultural responsiveness by SPS (2008), the fundamental elements of First Nations cultures are brought into the educational context to be honoured and developed. Two Saskatoon schools, Pleasant Hill Community School and Mount Royal Collegiate, volunteered to be sites of action research to develop a common understanding

of cultural responsiveness. During the 2007-2008 school year, Pleasant Hill organized several events to promote cultural responsiveness, including welcoming Elders into the school, developing collaboration among First Nations, Inuit and Métis representatives to generate cultural awareness in the school, and promoting sharing circles to increase the participation of parents and community members (Saskatoon Public Schools, 2008).

Aikenhead and Elliott (2010) claimed that culturally responsive science is being implemented in the curriculum of several Canadian provinces including Saskatchewan with the purpose of promoting the engagement and success of Indigenous students along with the enhancement of science for non-Indigenous students. The renewed K-12 science curriculum was drafted and modified within a context that embraces Euro-Canadian and Indigenous traditions and values, “in other words, Indigenous knowledge is recognized along with Eurocentric science’s conventional disciplines as a legitimate way to understand the physical world” (p. 329).

Hingley (2014) asserted that the educators who participated in a professional development project led by Elders and traditional knowledge keepers (TKK) furthered their understanding of and appreciation for culturally responsive curricula. The author revealed that those educators benefited from this program by “deepening their appreciation for and of FNMI cultural practices and worldview, increasing their confidence and determination to act on their knowledge and experiencing personal and spiritual growth” (p. 40). When describing the program, Hingley (2014) said that:

The Traditional Knowledge Keeper program was developed to support the work directly within schools. This program works in two ways. A TKK is deployed to a school that is working to become a culturally responsive school site. The Métis Cultural Program developed by the school principal and staff at Westmount Community School is an

example of a school that is working to become more culturally responsive. Another way that schools or teachers access the TKK program is by filing an online form requesting support for the inclusion of FNIM content and perspectives within a specific curricular area (p. 31).

Additional research studies have demonstrated how the integration of First Nations values and traditions occurs in school curricula and classrooms in other countries. Garvis (2006) studied educational programs developed by New South Wales and Queensland in Australia to compare how the policies of these programs were implemented to benefit gifted Aboriginal students. One of the methods used was an assessment designed specifically for Aboriginal pupils. Because Indigenous peoples do not primarily rely on writing skills to express themselves, the test did not require them to read or write. As part of an educational program developed in New South Wales, some Aboriginal learning methods utilized in classrooms included observation, imitation, and the use of examples from their real lives (Garvis, 2006).

Castagno et al. (2008) investigated how Culturally Responsive Schools (CRS) have been instituted for Native Americans in the U.S. The authors evaluated the extent to which the curricula, school policies, student expectations, modified assessment, teacher knowledge, and Indigenous community involvement have been implemented in culturally responsive schools. However, as a result, they found that most of the time CRS have neglected the implementation of Aboriginal ways of learning. For instance, the authors criticized the fact that teachers ended up using many standard textbooks rather than Indigenous experiences to teach Aboriginal students (Castagno et al., 2008).

An Implementation Model of First Nations CELs in a Literacy Class

The Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre (2009) provided a lesson plan model for a literacy class in which First Nations CELs are incorporated and activities require the use of their languages. Primarily, teachers provide an Indigenous story that illustrates the importance of Elders' roles for young Indigenous peoples. Cultural knowledge keepers have the responsibility of sharing their personal experiences in order to maintain the values and traditions of their communities (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009). Additionally, teachers then introduce the activity title, for example, "Writing a Response Paper: Animating your Human Giftedness" (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009). After introducing the name of the activity, teachers explain the guidelines the students should follow when discussing culture within their own family's rituals, traditions, and customs specific to their language group and then compose a report paper. The objective of such an activity is to have students explore their own cultural norms, values, and traditions through reflection (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009). It is also important to note that students discuss their family's traditions supplemented with their own language to animate and give meaning and vibrancy to the discussion.

The CSRP model as described above also provides instructions that could be effective in Indigenous students' understanding of how to complete the activity. Initially, Indigenous students are separated into groups and each group is assigned a recorder. Then, teachers have students read the Indigenous story. After that, Indigenous students enter an open discussion using the guiding questions:

- How do you honour your ancestors?
- What are your cultural beliefs? Identify the customs of your family, community and Nation.
- What traditions do you uphold and what is your role in these traditions?

- How are knowledge and values transferred inter-generationally?

Finally, as a group, Indigenous students report back to the class on their findings and students will then use these findings to compose their response paper (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009). In order to encourage and assist Indigenous students in writing their papers, teachers provide guidelines on how to organize their projects. However, in truth, this structural format falls within the Eurocentric English language model. Thus, it should be taken into consideration that a more flexible approach could empower Indigenous students to come up with more authentic outcomes in terms of loyalty to their culture.

Furthermore, teachers provide points to be considered in the students' papers whenever possible. Such consideration points include describing the social and cultural fabric of the student's community, linking both the values and practices that are observed, including reflections related to their personal learning experience and demonstrating indirectly the student's knowledge of the material covered in class lectures, discussions and readings (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009).

The students will be assessed according to their contribution, participation in class, and graded assignments (pass/fail) (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009). Through a "talking circle," teachers are encouraged to have a closing discussion with their students about their experiences completing the project (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009).

According to the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre (2009), this kind of lesson has a pedagogy that is culturally sustainable to Indigenous education. Whenever CELs are incorporated and connected to Indigenous knowledge systems, Indigenous students can more easily define themselves in their world and within their culture and, as a direct result, better develop a sense of belonging (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009). From this effective

and culturally-bound model of teaching, teachers are likely to engage the Indigenous students in their process of learning through the development of trusting relationships and the positive representation of Indigenous cultural elements (Goulet & Goulet, 2014). As these authors affirmed, students might embrace the schooling process if the rudiments of Eurocentric culture that contribute to racism and discrimination are not present. Thus, this type of lesson plan reinforces the Indigenous identity within the educational curriculum.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter focuses on the research design of this study including the methodology of the research, its rationale, data collection, data analysis, possible ethical issues, delimitations, limitations, how trustworthiness was established and the significance of this study. Demographic information about the research site and the participants is also included in this chapter.

This research study embraces a generic qualitative research (Sandelowski, 2000) within a constructivist framework. The purpose of this study is to investigate and identify how the Cultural Essential Learnings are incorporated in lesson plans from four teachers' own cultural experiences and perspectives. Furthermore, this research study includes other First Nations traditions and values that those teachers might also develop on their lesson plans in order to work successfully not only with First Nations students, but with all students. Since the investigation of this research is done from the teachers' own experiences and perspectives, a generic qualitative research study within a constructivist framework is appropriate.

Qualitative descriptive studies are known as the least "theoretical" on the spectrum of qualitative approaches (Sandelowski, 2000). Researchers who conduct such studies are less grounded in pre-existing theoretical and philosophical frameworks. Even though a generic qualitative study points to a direction that is less theoretically oriented, (Caelli & Mill, 2003), a constructivist conceptual framework influenced the interpretation of the data of this study. The information gathered during the process of interpretation was the result of various subjectivities combined in an effort to give meaning to experiences. The constructivist theoretical framework has an approach in which the hidden meaning has to be brought to the surface through deep reflection. This reflection can be generated by the interaction between researchers and participants during which the hidden meaning can be exposed. The relationship between

researcher and participants can build findings from their interactive dialogue and interpretation (Ponterotto, 2005).

As Cooper and Endacott (2007) stated, researchers should make their theoretical position explicit, establish congruence between methodology and methods, make clear strategies to establish rigor, and identify the analytic lens through which data are examined to reach the credibility of a generic qualitative research. The authors also suggested that a generic qualitative researcher can clarify all the elements mentioned above without declaring alliance to one of the specific approaches (e.g., narrative, phenomenology) and take a general approach towards educational issues.

Therefore, a constructivist theoretical perspective was used for the analysis of the data for it seems “educational phenomena should never be labeled as objective since the voices of researchers and participants are biased and seated in different cultural experiences and identities” (Hays & Singh, 2011, p. 41). Even though First Nations epistemologies, values, and traditions are characterized as part of Cultural Essential Learnings, First Nations teachers have their own personal meanings regarding their cultural experiences, and it is expected that these specific personal views will be reflected in their discourses. In this research, names and meanings of First Nations values and traditions are given based on First Nations teachers’ own cultural experiences.

Rather than being selected randomly, the participants were chosen using specific criteria. Purposeful sampling was employed to recruit four to six self-declared First Nations elementary teachers who instructed literacy classes in Saskatoon. Intentional sampling strategies are oriented to strengthen the comprehension of selected individual or group experiences (Devers & Frankel, 2000).

In order to get a better understanding of the teachers' experiences professionally and culturally, this study consisted of semi-structured interviews (see Appendix C for list of questions) and the interviews were scheduled in advance. A semi-structured interview consists of open-ended questions intended to explore without following a rigid format of questioning (Guthrie & Hall, 1984). I had an interview protocol as a starting point, but teachers were allowed to expand their answers if they desired. According to Guthrie and Hall, 1984, this format allows the interviewer to explore topics that may not have been considered in advance. It also tends to put the subject in a more comfortable position, which might help the interviewee to talk more about the topics that have been investigated. A semi-structured interview allows more flexibility to explore with those teachers their opinions and experiences regarding their culture and profession. According to Holstein et al. (1995), the interviews must include questions that generate open and undistorted communication between the interviewer and the respondents.

An individual interview format was beneficial for getting a better understanding of individual perspectives and experiences. Using this format was more likely to establish a trusting relationship between the interviewer and interviewee (Holstein et al., 1995). The language used for the interviews was made clear and explicit to the interviewees. Before discussing the questions, I established rapport with the participants by engaging in casual conversation and reassured them of the confidentiality of this research. Facilitating the rapport process is important in building trust with respondents in order to guarantee honesty in their responses. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) affirmed that by developing a gentle, friendly conversation with respondents in which a level of trust and acceptance is established, interviewers can collect valid responses. The author described two approaches to the answers to validate their honesty. One approach is based on the rational aspect of the answers by focusing on the explanations and reasons given by

respondents. Another approach takes into consideration the respondents' feelings and emotions that might appear during the interview process if the respondents feel comfortable enough to express their feelings. In order to help respondents answer genuinely, interviewers should know their role, in which interviewers must not give their personal opinions and must avoid stereotyping respondents. (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) The authors claimed that if interviewers behaved in a non-judgemental way, respondents will feel more comfortable to express their opinions and feelings. By receiving honest answers, the validity of this research is enhanced and a genuine, positive outcome for the teachers is more likely since the interpretation of the results will be based on the assumption that teachers have answered truthfully (Hays & Singh, 2011). The validity of this research is guaranteed by a thick description of data and the use of reflexive journaling that will be further explained in this chapter.

The interviews were expected to be concluded within a single one hour for each participant, and the template consisted of fourteen questions. There were four participants. The interviews were scheduled and arranged at the participants' schools. Taking into consideration teachers' busy schedules, and in the interest of convenience, it was better to conduct each interview at a school based upon the individual teacher's timetable.

A reflexive journal was used during data collection in the interest of trustworthiness (Hays & Singh, 2011). After each interview with the teachers, thoughts, feelings, and reactions that appeared during the data collection were recorded in a journal. Journal-keeping is an important tool to register personal feelings, impressions, and opinions and was helpful in analysing the researcher's own biases towards the interpretation of the data. Moreover, it provided another source of information for the data collection to support interpretation. The researcher's subjectivity cannot be denied in qualitative research since it is an integral part, but

having a closer relationship with a study allowed the researcher to have a deeper understanding of the data through insights, both fact-based and intuitive (Hays & Singh, 2011). Each inquiry for data analysis is unique, and the insights, analytic abilities and style of the investigator is acknowledged as having a direct impact on the results (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

The recruitment of the participants started after ethics approval was received by the ethics board committees from both the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education from the University of Saskatchewan and from the Public School Division of Saskatoon. The recruitment of First Nations elementary teachers in Saskatoon began by contacting the principals from two public schools that were identified as potential places to collect the data with First Nations teachers. The principals contacted the teachers through their email addresses. This process, known as a snowballing technique, is a procedure in which the researcher gains access to participants through contact information provided by other informants (Noy, 2008). Four First Nations elementary teachers from one school, who instructed literacy in Saskatoon, were recruited. The sample size is small but justified by the fact that the objective of qualitative research is to gain a depth of understanding about a phenomenon (Hays & Singh, 2011).

Prior to the interviews, the teachers were contacted through email with cover letters which included the objectives of this study, a description of how confidentiality would be kept, the social importance of this research, the manner in which trustworthiness would be established, how potential ethical issues such as anonymity would be maintained, as well as detailed information regarding the actual interview process. Once the teachers agreed to participate in this research, the interviews were booked in accordance with their schedules.

Thematic analysis, which is a method that identifies, analyzes and reports patterns (themes) within the data, was used. This kind of organization and description makes the data

richer and more detailed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data analysis of this study followed six phases suggested by Rennie (2012): (a) becoming familiar with the data by reading and re-reading them, and by recording ideas; (b) paying attention to interesting features of the data that will be coded in a systematic way, and writing the data suitable to each code; (c) looking for themes among the codes, and organizing them into potential themes; (d) checking the themes to see if they work in terms of the codes given to parts of the data and relating them to the entire set of data; (e) naming and defining themes, followed by a continuous analysis; (f) producing the report with the analysis of the data, which will be categorized by themes and related to the research questions and literature.

To manage the data, interviews were recorded with a digital audio recorder. The participants were informed about the audiotaping in the cover letter, and they consented to the use of this data collection method. Before the commencement of the interviews, the participants were reminded about the audiotaping, and they had the option to ask me to turn it off should they feel uncomfortable with being recorded at any time during the interview.

The categorization of the interview themes was based on the First Nations values and traditions defined by CELs that are, as previously mentioned: relationships (kinship), respect (values), sharing, ultimate protection, love, obedience, humility, thankfulness, and strength (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009). However, it was taken into consideration that some information given by the participants might not fit the CEL categories, and this research study considered emergent categories to be part of its findings. Berg (2009) discussed how it is possible to code pre-determined categories and emergent categories that might arise in the course of analyzing the data. Berg named these emergent categories as theoretical classes. These theoretical classes are grounded in the data, and they become recognized after researchers

carefully review the data (Berg, 2009). These emergent categories might not be linked to CELs, but were most likely related to other First Nations values and traditions as well as to the research questions.

With regard to ethical issues, some cultural implications could have potentially arisen during this research, including challenges associated with interacting with First Nations teachers who have their own cultures and worldviews which are vastly different from the researcher's. The three principles described in the guidelines for research with Indigenous peoples were considered in this study (Panel on Research Ethics, 2015). The three principles are: (a) the respect for persons (assured through the free and informed ongoing consent of participant), (b) concern for welfare (research will not interfere with Indigenous peoples' capacity to maintain their cultures, languages and identities), and (c) justice (data and results benefits will be shared, and dissemination of information will have to have previous consent).

Prior to the interviews, as a way to ensure that the interview questions were unobjectionable in light of First Nations traditions and values, an Elder was consulted. Confirming that the interview questions for the First Nations teachers would be respectful to their cultures and traditions was critically important. Before meeting the Elder, the First Nations protocols were studied in order to thoroughly understand how to behave in a courteous and respectful manner (First Nations Protocols and Methodologies, 2009). For example, when approaching an Elder or a First Nations teacher, a soft handshake should be offered. Furthermore, I should introduce myself, say where I am from, and by whom I was referred. When they speak I must not, under any circumstances, interrupt. I should let them know what I am interested in learning. I also should let them know I can offer tobacco and cloth (First Nations Protocols and Methodologies, 2009). The approval of an Elder would guarantee that the

questions were respectful to the First Nations cultures. In the meeting with the Elder, I showed her my interview questions and she pointed to me that they were too descriptive and inquisitive. The questions were not formulated to foster relationship building between the participants and the researcher. The Elder helped me change the wording of the interview questions to make them more culturally respectful and put the relational aspect into perspective.

With regard to the trustworthiness of this research, some verification strategies were employed during the collection and analysis of the data. As mentioned above, a thick description was used, not only as a strategy of trustworthiness, but also as a way of reporting and interpreting the data. As Hays & Singh (2011) described, a thick description is a very detailed, informative, reflective, and comprehensive way of reporting the data. Beyond the basic facts, feelings, observations, ethical and cultural implications, personal biases, theoretical framework, and pertinent notes from the journal were reported. Merriam (1998) also contributed to the discussion about rich or thick description, and affirmed that field notes, quotes from documents, participant interviews, electronic communication or a combination of all can add to the findings of the study.

There are several limitations that should be acknowledged in this study. One of the limitations is that I do not personally have a First Nations background; therefore, the interpretation of the data could be affected. To address this concern, a double-checking strategy was used. After interpreting the data, the First Nations teachers were invited to review the results. The results were revised based on participating teachers' feedback and suggestions. Another limitation of this study was the relatively small sample of participants. This could potentially limit the transferability of the findings. Despite these limitations, the findings of this

study may help other researchers develop future studies about First Nations values and traditions. Further investigations will be needed since there is limited research on this topic to date.

Additionally, the focus of this study is on First Nations elementary teachers who instruct literacy classes for not only First Nations students, but also others. Thus, secondary school teachers were excluded from my study, as well as the teachers of other subjects such as math and science. As mentioned in chapter one, only one cultural group (Cree teachers) was investigated, which means that it is not a study that includes all cultural groups, or specific groups within First Nations cultures that have different cultural codes.

In terms of the significance of this study, First Nations teachers might reflect on their pedagogical strategies and how they deliver content to students. First Nations teachers might have the opportunity to think and make connections between CELs and other components of their daily curriculum. Additionally, other elementary teachers could make use of the reflections and the results of this research.

The Participants as Teachers: Some Information about Themselves

Alana (pseudonym first name)

Alana comes from a Cree and Dakota background. She grew up on the reserve and went to university to get her first degree, a B.A., and recently she got her B.Ed. She has been teaching in the Cree program for four years. She thinks that a school where the Cree culture is celebrated is so important for First Nations children.

Coreen (pseudonym first name)

Coreen also comes from a Cree background. She has been a teacher in the public school system since 2008. She worked at before and after school programs while she was doing her

studies and when she finished her first degree, she decided to go into education because she loved working with kids, making them laugh and building relationships.

Kalinda (pseudonym first name)

Kalinda stayed on reserve until close to her teenage years and then moved to the city. She comes from a large family and about half of them speak Cree as a first language and the other half do not because of family situations and dynamics over the years. Like her grandmother, she has always thought education is one of the most important things in life. However, she was not planning on being a teacher, but at the same time it just seemed like a good fit because school has always been a safe place for her. She has always loved to learn and to read. At the time of this study she had taught in the public system for about 23 years, and thinks that the love of learning and her positive experiences as a child in school have contributed to her role as a teacher.

Miah (pseudonym first name)

Miah is from a First Nations reserve. She was an educational assistant for 21 years, and a few year prior to this study, she became a teacher. She speaks Cree and Spanish, and she is proud of her language, which made her continue teaching it. She was taken to a residential school when she was a child and lost her language. However, she was taught Cree again when she returned to her auntie's house. So she knows the value of language, and when a Cree immersion position came up at the school, she jumped at the opportunity because she believed that people can find their identities through language.

The Nêhiyâwiwin Cree Language and Culture Program through the Teachers' Lenses

The information about the Cree program offered in Saskatoon was given by the participants, and presented through quotes to maintain the essence of the participants' opinions of the program.

Alana

So we're pre-K to grade six/seven right now. We're hoping to grow to grade eight. So our numbers are constantly growing because the parents are very – they love this program. They want their children in this program. They want their kids participating. You know they have – we were out there the other day in the playground and the grade six/sevens were putting up the tipi. Practicing how to put up the tipi. You know things like that that they get exposed to the culture. It's a partnership between Saskatoon Tribal Council. All I know is that it's a partnership with Saskatoon Tribal Council. So that's a tribal council in this area. So we're in Treaty 6 territory so the Saskatoon Tribal Council they're the ones that – this is their treaty territory. So you're on Treaty 6 territory right now.

Coreen

There's 540 I think students in the school in both programs and then in the Cree program I think there's somewhere, I don't know specifically, but I think it's like around 270 I want to say. In the Cree program it's primarily kids who are First Nations or Metis or Inuit and in the English stream there's, it's very diverse so there's kids from all sorts of backgrounds, including First Nations kids too.

Kalinda

When I first came to this program, this particular program, I taught grades three and four and the challenges were quite big I thought because you know we're expected to do all the English curriculum and then integrate not only subjects but Cree, make sure that we

do have Cree integrated in all areas also. So daily commands such as “may I go to the washroom?” were done in Cree and so we do in the classroom in Cree and just infusing Cree whenever we can. So that is good because students who have been in the Cree program for a lot longer have done well. They have retained a lot in that they remember a lot of the commands and so I think that that’s quite evident. We’re hoping next year to expand even that. But I think that it’s, there’s been a lot of growth for sure in the program.

Miah

Oh, it’s multicultural. I love it. You know, it’s wonderful. I love the school. You’re able to use your language in the hallway and you also hear other languages and you know and other languages coming in and you see yourself in some of the students where you couldn’t speak English, you couldn’t, but you know, we have teachers here that are so professional that they are so good at helping these students speak the language. We have First Nations students and Metis anywhere speaking English but now there are so many opportunities, you’re the one who’s going to revamp that language and how are you going to do it? You know, so yeah it’s just a lot of really multicultural. Staff is wonderful.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter presents the data obtained from the interviews with the First Nations elementary teachers who instruct literacy in Saskatoon. The results are organized and presented through quotes according to the Cultural Essential Learnings (CELs) categories, which were related by the participants to the tipi teachings incorporated in their lesson plans. The tipi teachings are part of the educational philosophy of the Cree Language and Culture Program that takes place in the school where this research was conducted. The tipi teachings are essentially based on Indigenous values and traditions. The Cree people use 15 poles to make the structure of the tipi and for every pole in that tipi, there is a teaching. The tipi poles comprehend the following First Nations values and traditions: obedience, respect, humility, happiness, love, faith, kinship, cleanliness, thankfulness, sharing, strength, good child rearing, hope, ultimate protection, and control flaps (University of Saskatchewan, n.d.). These poles are further defined in Appendix H.

Building Trustful Relationships in the Classrooms: A Way to Show Love, Acceptance, and Harmony to Each Other

One of the pillars of the CELs and the tipi teachings is to build relationships. Through relationships among the members of First Nations families and people from the communities, love can be spread and, as a consequence, fortify the ties among them and give them roots (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009). The importance of building relationships, their benefits, and how they are developed in the classrooms, are mentioned by the participants in similar ways.

Alana

For the first participant students can build positive relationships through the talking circle, in which respect, comprehension, and trust can be developed and practiced. As a consequence, students can become more positive and generalize this positivity to other aspects of their lives, such as in their education:

Well we have a talking circle every day – every Monday. Every Monday morning. And it's just so that the kids can start – we can start our week in a positive way. We sit in a circle. The boys on one side. Girls on one side. We have a sharing rock and you have to introduce yourself. Tell them who I am. So you tell everybody who you are. You get the rock and you can talk as long as you want but we have to cut them off sometimes 'cause some of them just talk about – but we try to be positive about it but it's being respectful if we have to cut them short it's just being respectful because other people have a chance and then you get tired sitting on the floor. In the beginning it was really, really a struggle to have them do this. But as we've come to this point in time you see how much growth they've had. We have kids that are talking now that didn't talk. Or even just to say their name is like a big deal for some of them because they've come from different situations, whatever. And some of them just don't want to talk. And we have some that now they won't keep quiet. And they just tell us whatever. And they talk about their parents and sometimes we hear some things we don't want to hear and things that are alarming. But that's part of the sharing circle. And whatever they say in the sharing circle it stays in the sharing circle. Unless it's something that someone's hurting them or something. That's you know – but other than that it's private. It's just sharing and starting our day off in a traditional way and bonding us as a little community in our classroom. It's a sharing time. So they have the rock and they talk until they have the rock and then they're done. You

know they say, “Hai hai,” and they give it to the next person. We just want to let them know that we’re here if there’s ever a problem or if they need something or whatever.

In this second quote, the participant talks about the importance of making her students feel as part of a family in the classroom. It is through the process of bonding, understanding, and respecting the rules of sharing everyone’s space that harmonic relationships can be built:

Like for us the family is important to us. And for us that is important. Not all the kids in our classroom are at home with their parents. They’re with their grandparents. Some are with caregivers. Some are in the system. So you know for them to come into this classroom I think it’s important that they need to know that this is a family as well. This is a little family in this classroom. And making them – like when we start tipi teachings I always say this is like our classroom is like a tipi. So this is our tipi that we’re all going to live in. We’re going to follow these rules so that we can make our own classroom rules so that we can all get along. So we have a lot of this we just incorporate it into the classroom and teaching. You know teaching about kinship and family.”

Coreen

Through the following quote, the second participant’s examples of what is offered in the school to foster connections among community members. By promoting community feasts in the school, this teacher fosters positive connection among students, their families, and members of their communities:

We always talk about building relationships with the students and here we have, we really focus on building relationships with families also. So like for instance, tomorrow we are having a community feast. So we try and get our families to come out to the feast on a Saturday you know so we can build the relationships with families also. Everybody

in the school is welcome, the whole school and the whole community so but whoever decides to come will come. That's definitely a big part of it, yeah, building relationships and trust and positive, just positive school experiences. Like building the relationships with the kids is really important. We're lucky because we two have two employed elders at our school so there's definitely, we see them in the hallway every day, the kids are able to connect with them every day, and because they do, it's like I said it's like a grandparent for them so it's sort of that love connection and they're able to kind of, you know, recharge on that everyday so I think that we're really lucky."

This second quote shows the possible healing aspect that comes out from building positive relationships:

Building relationships and trust and positive, just positive school experiences. Even just, or what they're living with, a lot of them have food security issues, a lot of them have home security issues, they're moving a lot or different people are looking after them, their families are changing all the time, a lot of them have like I said suffered trauma or their families have suffered trauma so they're passing it onto them. So when they come in, they're bringing a lot with them, more than just you know a child who has just positive life experience. So definitely the focus is like the relationship has to come first.

This next quote connects an educational project based on the tipi teachings and the First Nations cultural element of building relationships. By learning the act of showing love, students can bond with people:

Every month we have a focus of a tipi teaching. For instance, an easy one to think of is love because in February we work on love because of Valentine's Day so then you have

whatever books we can read on love, you know family love or whatever it is so then we incorporate that teaching right into that. So that's pretty much how it goes, like whatever the theme is, you can just, it goes side by side and then usually like I try to have like tasks or activities or whatever too like for the Valentine's Day with love we were giving away free hugs as part of that too so we were walking around the school giving away free hugs as part of you know, learning about love and learning how to share love with each other in a good way.

Kalinda

This teacher talked about the value of having people from Cree culture that students can lean on in their lives, and how knowing where they came from allows them to build their identities as individuals and community members. She also acknowledged the fact that language is an essential part of students' cultural identities:

So all of the things really tie into the role of not only the being respectful but just knowing who you can count on like for the kinship I'm reading here and so they are very aware of our traditional knowledge keeper they call kôhkom, so it's really a good thing for them because some of them may not have kôhkom, a kôhkom in their lives and so they really get drawn to her and she's really open to being there for them and yeah willing to share. So all of these things come into play and even for them to know who they are and where they come from because if they grew up in the city and they rarely go to the reserve where they're from or have met their cousins, then they don't know who they are like in the sense of where they come from because a lot of the Cree language is really drawn to that. Even like kinship terms and so on, you need to have a sense of who

you are and where you come from and if they don't quite know, then that's where we could draw in some information perhaps getting to know they're family a little bit more.

Miah

This quote shows the role of Elders in Cree cultural identity. By building a relationship with children, Elders can teach them important elements from their cultures:

We go to sharing circles, they learn beading, they learn how to make things, they learn drumming, they learn singing, they learn dancing. So that's how we incorporate everything and that's with Mrs. Young too, she's the same you know, a very gentle soul, I mean Elders are, and so they learn from both Elders. We are so lucky we have Elders housed here, a man and a woman. We are so lucky. Yeah so you know you hear in the hallway "hi Kookum", "hi Mr. Wassas, hi Mr. Yangon" you know that, it's so nice you know? Oh they come in here, they sit in here, they come and talk to the children. They come and they do the circles. They talk to them in Cree and they use the language all the time – it's ongoing.

Teaching Respect (Values) in the Classrooms

Alana

These next quotes define how this teacher wanted her students to treat each other. Being respectful is one of the essential pillars of CELs and tipi teachings. Honouring people's basic rights such as respect is part of First Nations cultures (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009):

Respect. You know, not hitting each other and no punching. These are some of theirs. It says, "No guns," you know things like that, right? Things like that. So we base

everything pretty much on our values of the tipi teachings and then using the curriculum to guide us.

Not only respecting others, but respecting Mother Nature, which makes it possible for First Nations to be alive, is mentioned as part of their cultural learning:

Everything for Cree people is about Mother Nature and respecting it and having that part of our life. Part of respecting that and learning about the Earth and how everything has spirit and everything is, you know alive within Mother Earth. So the colours, the man, the woman. So everything in here revolves around this area right here because this is the most important is - and then we hang up our tipi teachings as we go along, you know so as we go through them and just making sure that they remember them. So when they're having them and I'm like, "Okay you know what? You guys aren't respecting me. But tell me what respect means." That's one of the poles; "The second pole. We should know what this means." So they'll be like, "Oh, we shouldn't be talking. No fighting. No guns." They always have this no gun thing. So in our classroom rules that we made at the beginning of the year. So these are what they made but it all is part of the tipi teachings so that they are always respectful of each other and sharing. You know as we sit back and talk and they'll shake hands when they're done. I'll like make them apologize to each other. You know you have to apologize and you have to shake hands because in the Cree custom shaking hands is very important. To shake a hand with somebody is very, very important. So we try and incorporate as much of the cultural stuff as we can.

Coreen

This teacher explains how she teaches the concept of respect to her students. By asking them to say something nice to another person, teaching them how to wait for their turns to speak, or listen to others, the teacher is incorporating the value respect into her classes:

Sometimes in the classroom we'll have a topic, so it's like the Monday and we'll say "okay let's share about our weekend" or if there's like a leader of the day then you know, "say something nice about this person, what can you say about the leader today?" But a lot of time it will just be just general sharing, whatever you want to share. Then we will have a sacred item, whether it be a rock or a bundle of sage or some sort of something, sacred item, that they can use to take turns and so the point, something they learn is that they're not allowed to speak unless they have that item and that their job is just to be listening, so. That can be really hard for five year olds too but they're really good at it, they do learn. Everyone takes turns and we go around the circle and then we shake hands afterwards and that's it.

Kalinda

The following quotes represent the teacher's opinion on how she and her students should be treated, and how some cultural and social protocols should be taken, followed and respected by students:

So my educational philosophy is to keep learning, to be open to learning like every day however you can. You know, treat others with respect and of course when I think about my students, having them do the same for themselves and for others. I think that's super important and we do talk a lot about how we could do that, how we could get along with others.

Like I talked to you about the respect of being able to just be there for not only ourselves but for others in a classroom definitely for students in our program, So they are very used to the, just the way things are done. So there are certain protocols one has to follow, not only in the sharing circle, how certain things should be done and sort of the knowledge of how things should be done and so that is definitely followed because the students have been working and not only conducting the sharing circles, not themselves but certainly being helpers for the young boys in there for them to know what is expected of them in the sharing circle, sort of where to sit and sort of how to, for the girls for example to wear, to get a skirt because we supply the skirts and that and they just put it over what they're wearing, and how to sit , be sitting properly which is a respectful sign, show of respect to the traditional knowledge keeper, and to the whole process. So we do that not only with the sharing circle but with the feasts. So at our school we have feasts. Our program puts on feasts at least a couple of times a year and we just had one like a few weeks ago and so we talk a lot about the protocol, what is expected, and sort of the viewing and they've been to feasts before many of them and they know what is expected of them so we go through a lot of that, the protocols.

The cultural protocols that we're required to know for the sharing circle and/or the feasts or any other cultural events that we go to, like say a powwow or, all of those cultural areas require a form of knowledge and so for the young boys in here for example, they may have the role of Ostapewsak, which are helpers in those ceremonies or in some of those ceremonies that we have. So in that way, they are carrying on that knowledge and so we're carrying on even those teachings in our classroom. So it's not only just in one place, but it's something that will serve them a purpose not only in the classroom but out

of the classroom also and well into the many years that they continue to take part in these ceremonies.

Miah

In this quote, the teacher talked about the sharing circle as a way to learn and practice respect. Through the talking stick and the eagle feather, children can wait for their turns to speak. This is a way to practice respect among each other:

In my classroom we open up with Monday sharing circles, we ask for guidance, to give us strength, you know, and we talk and we have a talking stick. The only time anyone can talk – and sometimes I’ll use my eagle feather – the only time anyone can talk is when they have that stick in their hand, otherwise nobody says a word because we have that respect in a circle. This way everybody gets to speak, everybody gets to share, you know.

Sharing: Developing Reciprocity by Teaching the Acts of Giving and Receiving Indigenous Knowledge in the Classrooms

Sharing is part of Cree values and traditions. By learning how to give and receive, First Nations also learn how to be part of their families and communities (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009). In the Cree program, the students start learning to share the attention of their teachers, as mentioned in the first quote.

Alana

These are little kids that came from homes where at home they were by themselves. They were by themselves. Everything was theirs. So then they come here and they have to share. And they even have to share a teacher. And for them it’s like a really big deal.

According to this teacher, sharing knowledge is also part of Cree culture. Sharing knowledge is a way to acquire knowledge and positively embrace other cultures:

But we also – we had the Dakota in from Whitecap. They came in and we did a cultural day with them as well. So that was really cool. And they're part of our Saskatoon Public School Division now. They're part of us as a whole now. And having them come and just share a little bit of their knowledge is part of just being part of the curriculum. Making sure we understand each other. And like when I grew up I never knew that – like we never knew about the Dakota. We didn't know about the Saulteaux. We didn't know about the Cree, you know? So just like growing up I want them to know right from the get-go. This is who you are and this is who you're always going to be. But just embrace it in a really good positive way. And so yeah, this is part of who we are. So this is – the essential learnings are just part of the teachings.

These next quotes show how older students, called “care partners,” and other staff from the Cree program come to literacy classes and teach other students to associate words with letters of alphabet in Cree, and also elements of their culture:

We have all the symbols are there but there's also the words, right. So the symbols are there so the kids – we got our care partners to come in. The grade five Cree came in and they helped us cook pancakes with the kids. Simon Says. Simon says it's all, “Nake – stop. Nimihitowin – dance.” So this is part of it too. So you know we do English. Duck goose. We do it in Cree, you know. So “Sisip niska,” you know? So everything we try and add the little bit of Cree in with and then the literacy as well. We have the alphabet there. They have pictures of all the – you know A, what's an A? So E for Eagle. So they know that this is an E and that's an Eagle. So those are just some of the symbols that are important in the First Nations and they get to know what those are. And they figure that out. And then they figure out that their names begin with some of those letters. And so

then it's just like, "Oh! Our names." So then they're figuring out what their name is for the alphabet. So it's always – and then we're reading to them. We have Cree books. English books. So we're always reading. And we have the care partners in. They'll come in and read. Like yesterday after we were done our pancakes the care partners read to them. And then they went in little groups and they did some. So then they're learning that it's fun to read. Fun to have other people read with you and how literacy is important. And reading. And learning about the alphabet is very important. And then we have our Cree words. Like counting in Cree. We have one to ten. We have some animals that we're learning about and we have the pictures. So we always have the pictures. Like we just finished learning about the buffalo which is a major thing for the Cree people because the buffalo, you know we followed the buffalo. And so we always followed the buffalo. And I taught them about all the things that we got from the buffalo.

And then this was our Christmas concert and it was about the Trickster. He's part of our culture. And he's Santa Claus. So he comes as Santa Claus and he comes and eats at everybody's houses. So for us to tie everything together like a traditional Christmas is not like a traditional Christmas how they celebrate. How we celebrate Christmas. So we have to figure out how to adapt it to our world. So Trickster which is a big part of a lot of our legends. His name is Wesakechak. He does a lot of things. Like he does a lot of tricks. He gets food and things like that. So we adapted that into our storyline of how Christmas – what Christmas is about. So it's about Wesakechak. The Trickster. He's the one who goes down chimneys and how could he go down chimneys? So right there. Like we adapt it so that all these ceremonial, these holidays we figure out a way of how to adapt it into our culture. So we have like the people dancing – our vice principal he is a dancer. He

dances. Our knowledge keeper. He runs the drum. This is our drum group. Our drum group he's taught all our drummers, you know? And the drummers a lot of them are from the older grades. They come into our classroom here. They come and role model good behavior.

Coreen

This teacher and teacher 3 agree that elders are important figures in the Cree culture, who share their traditions, values, knowledge, and language through oral stories to the kids and staff from the program as well:

She works with all of the Cree classrooms and she works with the English classrooms too but she yeah she comes in and she speaks Cree to the kids and passes on teachings as kind of a grandmother figure to them. The elders that work at our school are responsible just for sort of being that positive role model, being somebody who can pass on teachings, share stories, share the language, guide the teachers, provide yeah provide insight for the teachers and the students into the teachings or traditions that they know and just be leaders that way and also the relationships.

Kalinda

In the Nehiyawewin Cree Culture and Language Program, we have a traditional knowledge keeper and weekly we get together with her to do sharing circles. What a wonderful opportunity for these students to, not only incorporate traditional Aboriginal pedagogy that has been in place for hundreds and hundreds of years, and to incorporate that in a setting, like in a culture room, and then they get a chance to share themselves in there like whole-heartedly and willingly with no pressures.

As expressed in this following quote, teaching and learning by giving and receiving are important components of sharing, which can be done through the cultural activities.

Like the sharing circles and the feasts and so on and so forth. Anytime we do any cultural learnings, this year we've done a lot, we made rattles with our cultural resource teacher and sort of even went and did a little bit of research into the role of the rattle in ceremonies and so on. So when we do something, like an activity, we're always drawing some kind of a cultural learning, like bridge that connection for them so that would make sense for them. Like where did that come from? All the different parts of the rattles and how is it used? So really drawing on their personal experiences also because in their family they are going and doing and taking part in these cultural activities also, so they're really bringing that back here and they're learning from what we're doing and also we're learning from what they're doing also.

Miah

The next quote expressed the teacher's gratitude from receiving knowledge from other community members. Because of the act of sharing, she could become a teacher, and pass what she learned to her students:

I just incorporated everything and I always try and make things positive. I try and work things where you know, we're, we all need to work together, we all need to share our values, we all need to respect one another so you know I, you know it's amazing how you incorporate things but I can't even really explain it because I know that it's working with me for my students and it's not only with my students – it's everybody, you know. Like the staff and I somehow, I connect to everybody and you know it's, I don't know – it's a work in progress. I don't know, I can't really say, you know. But everything I've learned,

everything that I've, you know, learned from being an Educational Assistant, learned from my internship, and learned from the Elders, learned from you know everybody, I incorporate a lot that and I try to do what I can to be a very positive teacher. I try to do what I can to make a difference in the child's learning so I do what I can. I got a long ways to go, but I'm still learning.

Ultimate Protection: Caring about the Spiritual, Emotional, Physical, and Intellectual Dimensions

Having balanced health, in which body, mind, emotions, and the spirit of the person are considered, is an essential dimension of First Nations cultures (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009).

Alana

In this following quote, the teacher brings the sharing circle as a way to care about the emotional aspects of her students:

And they talk about their parents and sometimes we hear some things we don't want to hear and things that are alarming. But that's part of the sharing circle. And whatever they say in the sharing circle it stays in the sharing circle. Unless it's something that someone's hurting them or something. But that's like our quiet time is to sit and just talk about. And if they have problems or whatever. Whatever it is. Whatever you share we just – and it's really cute when they say, "Well I had a good weekend." You know? It's just like – but it's nice to hear them. And then sometimes we hear some sad stuff and, "I miss my mom." You know things like that. Or, "I miss my dad." "I don't have a dad." You know stuff like that. But we just adapt it. And at least they're sharing something personal.

In this next quote, it can be seen the physical activity being done in classroom as part of taking care of students wellbeing. As a result, there will be a positive effect on the emotional, spiritual, and mental dimensions as well:

So anything we do and we even, actually our body break, it's called Powwow Sweat and it's online and it's basically dancing and they show you how to dance The kids really enjoy it because it's a lot of work, it's really – it makes you sweat, but it's like a body break. So our body break is you know, a powwow sweat. And it's dancing. And they're on- on YouTube. So this is both women and men. So then they have like one dress, double beads, for all the different – there's a grass dance. So then they – the boys and the girls we all practice. So that's our body break. Just incorporating another – keeping it you know traditional. You know so keeping it online with you know having to do body breaks, but finding a body break that works for us and we're still, like, you know, traditional culture still acknowledged so, you know.

The teacher also commented about the medicinal properties of smudging for the students' soul, especially when they are having a negative day, and need to change it to a positive one:

Because our Knowledge Keepers, they take the children in there. They have sharing circles, they learn how to put up a tipi, there's smudging in there, you know and the medicine. So you can like go in and, some days when you're just having a real bad day it's so nice to be able to just go there and just have a quick smudge, you know? You know like I'm having a bad day, like okay, what am I going to do? How am I going to change this around into a positive? Just go and have a quick smudge.

Coreen

This next teacher emphasized the importance of approaching students within a holistic perspective. She also called attention to the intergenerational trauma that most First Nations students have been suffering due to residential schools. For her, in order to help these students heal, they need to be seen and taken care of within a more comprehensive approach, where all aspects of an individual should be considered:

I always have to think of the spiritual education of the child and emotional. A lot of the kids that we teach have suffered trauma or something inter-generational trauma and so when they are coming to school they aren't just coming to learn ABC's. They are coming to learn how to be loved, they are coming to learn how to be kind to each other, they are coming to learn their language, their identity, so it's really what people say holistic. It really has to be holistic here. We have to address all these things.

Kalinda

The following teacher is also concerned about the negative effects of residential schools not only on those who experienced that, but also on the next generations within their families. She talked about the importance of having a supportive educational system for First Nations kids who might be going through intergenerational trauma. For her, it is essential to support those kids in which the four dimensions (emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual) are all connected:

As a Cree teacher and then the Nehiyawewin Cree Culture and Language program we see a lot of students that are so, are just thirsty to learn their language and their culture and they really do soak it in. They're like sponges. Like they just, they're just so proud of who they are. Seeing that and for them to be forming their own identity and gaining confidence is really such a good thing because whatever else is happening in their lives

on a daily basis, they have no control over. So they come to school with a lot of, already a lot on their plate, whether it be family issues, breakdowns, or addictions in the family, or whatever the case may be. So we do see a lot of the effects from the family, inter-generational effects even, residential schools, and even from the sixties which involves child welfare system of parents growing up in the system and then not being able to parent their own children or you know from the residential schools not being able to parent their own children the way ideally one should and it's really, we can see that and we can see that we have areas socially, academically, and even emotionally, because they may be dealing with a parent – or parents even – who are not there. So we see a lot of grandparents raising their own grandchildren. So we're very open to whatever the family situation is and really trying to be there almost a lot of people may see it as oh you're bending over backwards for them, but really it is a different way of looking at it. It's doing what we can to help them be successful because in this education system and all the supports that are there may not have fully supported them in the past and so in that way, which I could see that really just there is a big part of their day here at, in a school day.

In this next quote, the teacher focused on the medicine wheel approach in her lesson plans as an effective way to make herself and the students think more positively:

So we incorporated lessons about how to do that and just really trying to get them to be thinking more positively. So every day I believe everyone has to keep working at that, even as individuals, even as how many years you have them as a teacher or if you don't have that many years you just have to be always working towards that. How do you do that? Well I think about like the medicine wheel with the four parts, the emotional, the

intellectual, the physical, and the spiritual. All of those four parts need to be balanced. I believe that now more than ever before, like before I think as a teacher, like a younger teacher, you may not be like reflecting on that so much but then you get to a certain point and you reflect on it more, a lot more, and then like oh yeah that really makes sense now to do that now, so. Especially if you have any personal life challenges along the way and sort of to be sure you're balancing yourself. I think that is really showing a lot of growth and for students to know that they need to do that for themselves also. We talk about the four parts of a medicine wheel, hopefully should be making some sense for them also. So we would go over and just essentially how to gain positive work habits and even personal habits yourself and even with others. So and of course all of these, a person can talk about this, even the tipi teachings along with this, and the medicine wheel which is back there that we have and then that also I talk about like all of the things that we do in our classroom that are part of the four parts of the medicine wheel. So it just all sort of integrated so it's a lot to do but it's worthwhile doing it and I think I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing if I didn't think it was worthwhile.

Miah

This teacher also talked about the effectiveness of using the medicine wheel approach for her own life, and its expansion in her lesson plans, such as its incorporation in literacy when she explored the comprehension of each concept of the medicine wheel with her students:

Ultimate protection, I follow the medicine wheel, the physical, the emotional, the spiritual, and the mental. I follow that, I try every day of my life, because I have a lot of kids and I have been under a lot of you know, I've struggled all my life. I never ever thought I would come to this point because of all the struggles I've had and so I follow

that medicine wheel and I do what I can to maintain a good life and to be a good person. You know what, as far as literacy goes, in terms of health I use my tipi teachings and I incorporate them into health because you know, I use the medicine wheel and that's how I incorporate literacy whereas they learn about the medicine wheel, they learn about what does being physical mean? What does being mental mean? They come up with their own words, their own ideas, their own comprehension, you know? And then we learn about the tipi meanings. You can work the medicine wheel in meaning the same because we know what physical is all about, it's part of health, taking care of yourself, you know. We know what spirituality is you know, we know that it's, you know you have a belief, everybody does. So you know you just interconnect them. You just have to know how to connect them.

Obedience: Learning by Valuing the Oral Tradition

Alana

Indigenous learn by listening to traditional stories, their parents or guardians, their teachers, and fellow students. Through obedience, First Nations can learn with their role models who teach them not only how to display good behaviours, but also tell them stories that capture the essence of traditional values (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009). Three participant teachers explained the meaning of obedience, and how it is taught in their classrooms.

This teacher showed the essence of obedience through the sharing circles. By participating in the sharing circles, Cree students learn to be patient and good listeners, and as a consequence they are taught to follow the classroom rules:

Like we have a sharing circle every Monday morning so that they learn how to sit properly. And as children we were supposed to learn how to have patience and the kids I

don't think are being taught at home. So obedience. So, "I must listen to and obey my elders, grandparents, kokum and teachers." So obedience. Like just getting them to hear these all the time and this is how we have to live. These are what we follow in our classroom. This is what's going to make up our rules of – you know we have these rules for our classroom that keeps our – they're our classroom rules, right? Everybody has classroom rules they make in the fall. So our tipi teachings help us to make our classroom rules.

Coreen

This teacher conceptualized obedience through videos and games to make it more tangible to her students:

At the beginning of the year we focus on obedience. That's the first one that they learn because it's sort of a new experience for a lot of them to come to school and have to listen and follow instructions so I have like a few videos that we watch, or they're stories and so we sort of have, I can tell them about the tipi teachings to start off with and like how we need all of those things to be strong, because if you only have like one or two things it falls over you know? And so like to have the First Nations perspective, and so we use the, it's called Howard Wigglebottom as like the behavioral expectation, the video for that and then it helps to do both because it's really like kind of an abstract thing, like to talk to them about these things, just to say like you know, "be obedient!" They usually don't understand if we just talk to them so using something that they can connect with like a story or a video or a book and like I said like having action, they can do something, like taking action for it. So like for obedience I always like to play like Simon Says because it's just doing what I say you know and that's a big part of it [laughter]. That's a

big part of it of learning, you just do what other people are asking you to do. So and playing games helps with the learning, otherwise it's just very abstract for them to understand.

Miah

This teacher talked about the importance of stories to Cree people, since it is one of the sources from which their values are passed on. It is through stories that Cree people can learn their main values and traditions:

What I do with the students is “do you understand what I’m saying?” and they will tell me what I’m saying, “do you understand the story” you know, so. In English and in Cree because, you know in order for them to comprehend, you know you have to ask them, they have to reply to you and do they really understand what I’m talking about? I speak a lot of Cree, so yeah. But everything I’ve learned, everything that I’ve, you know, learned from being an Educational Assistant, learned from my internship, and learned from the Elders, learned from you know everybody. I have an elder here. They go the cultural room. That’s where they go and listen to stories, they go and listen to values. We connect them through tipi teachings. I’ll go with Mr. Wassas and we both do tipi teachings.

Humility: The Practice of Being Humble

Humility for the First Nations is the acknowledgement that they are not above or below others in the circle of life, and that comprehension comes when they understand and feel that they are so small compared to the grandiosity of Creation (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009).

Three teachers talked about humility in their interviews.

Alana

The following teacher talks about being humbled and respectful towards Elders as they own the knowledge of Cree traditions that are passed on to younger ones. The teacher is grateful for having received this knowledge that enables her to pass on to her students:

Like we have our kohkum in our school. We have – like she's our knowledge keeper. So we have a female knowledge keeper and we have a male knowledge keeper. Those are our people that help guide us and that's what for me is like I look to the people that have the knowledge. And I look up to those people. And they're the ones who are helping us to be a success. And it's those knowledge of our old traditional ways that we're going – that are helping us to guide us now. What we teach is our beliefs. Our cultural beliefs. Our beliefs in the Creator. And our spiritual beliefs and what we valued.

The next quote shows how humility is expressed among Cree people. The teacher described how the teaching relationship between her and the female Elder from the school.

She'll tell me if I'm not doing it right. Or if I've made a mistake she'll do it but in a gentle way. And she doesn't criticize me. She'll tell me in a really nice way. A very humble way of – and that's what it's about humbleness. Like and having humbleness and being able to guide us without making anybody feel bad. And I've never felt bad about anything. Or if she's corrected me. Just because she's got all this knowledge and I respect that and I always will. And she makes me feel like she took me under her wing and just helps me, you know? And in a good way. And that's the same with our Knowledge Keepers. They don't correct us in a bad way. You know we're not like, "Oh you did it the wrong way!" No, they'll tell us gently how to correct it. Or change. Or guide us in a nice, good way. And there's no harsh treatment about if someone's done something.

Coreen

This teacher also explained the concept of humility, and even though she said it is hard for the students to understand what it means to be humble, she is trying to teach this essential value to them:

The idea of humility being that we're all deserving of the same respect so none of us is above the other is what the understanding is. If anything, the person beside you, you should, you're below them. So that's sort of the cultural teaching with that which can be really hard for little kids to get but they do, they will, they will get it.

Miah

This teacher, besides conceptualizing humility, also emphasized the role of Elders as guides in Cree culture. She highlighted the Elder's positive effect in her career as a teacher, since this teacher also transmits to students the knowledge she acquired and the importance of learning from each other:

Humility – I don't believe I'm above anybody. I learned that. We're not above anybody. We're all equal people. It doesn't matter what we have, it doesn't matter. People are people so I look at everyone as equal. To be humble who you work with and who you teach. I also learned from Elders. I speak to Elders before I do anything. My guide is my Elders. So we have an elder in place, we have a man and a woman and they are wonderful teachers. We get to smudge you know. So I follow that you know, my philosophy is you know, if you've had good guidance in the past and if you've followed a good way, then I know you're going to be a good teacher. The students are going to survive and they're going to work with you and you know, it will be a good journey and it's a journey that we all learn. We all learn from one another.

Thankfulness: The Art of Learning to be Thankful to Others and the Creator

First Nations learn to be thankful for all the kindness that others have towards them, and for what is provided by the Creator (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009). Three teachers talked about thankfulness in their interviews.

Alana

This quote showed how thankful the teacher was for a lady who works with her and speaks Cree. She was thankful for all the support she gave to her in terms of helping with the language, which benefits the students as well:

She guided me so much. And she helps me every day. Even today. Every day I am grateful because I get to learn from somebody who knows all of that traditional stuff and to share her knowledge with me and her wealth. So it's so important to have somebody like her. For me, I learned so much from this woman. She helped me. She has guided me into – and every year our classroom we get better. This lady is so wonderful. She's like amazing. I can't thank her. Honestly I'll get emotional here but she has guided me from the day I started. And she is like – she's not an Elder but she is somebody who's guiding me. And she's got all the knowledge of our people in her that helps me and helps our whole school. It's not just me. It's our school.

The teacher also explained one way of teaching her students how to connect with the Creator by sending him their prayers in a ceremony. By sending their prayers, the students can practice how to be thankful:

We have a little ceremony for them. They get a little – we laminate these little paper feathers for them. So it's like – 'cause an eagle feather is so important in our culture. Like that's how the prayers are sent to Creator. The Eagle takes the prayers on his wings. So

we give them the paper eagle feather and we have a little feather we put in the cap as well. And it's not like real feathers. They're just – but it's a symbol. It's a symbol of acknowledging that's part of our culture. So that's important.

Coreen

This teacher connected Cree with First Nations cultural tradition of praying, which also brings that meaning of connection with the Creator and the feeling of being thankful to what the Creator has provided for them:

Parents love hearing their kids speak Cree, they love – like every day we have a prayer in Cree that we recite together, so the kids are able to recite the prayer on their own. It's so exciting for their parents and their families, it's very meaningful.

Miah

This quote shows how thankful the teacher was for Mother Earth, which is an essential part of Cree culture. Additionally, she mentioned that this feeling and attitude of being thankful for Mother Earth can be taught to her students through the subjects of literacy and science:

Thankfulness, I am so thankful for Mother Earth. In our culture, whatever we take from Mother Earth, we give her thanks. Animal, sage, sweetgrass, we give her tobacco, we give thanks you know, so. We're always thankful, we're always giving back to Mother Earth. You can use all these and mix them into literacy. You can put them into science – because in science you learn about Mother Earth.

Strength: Learning how to Accept Difficulties and be Proud of Themselves

Learning how to become strong by enduring and showing understanding in times of trouble is essential for First Nations to deal positively with difficult situations they might come across in their lives (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009). As one of the participants

mentioned, by learning how to do that, teachers can pass it on to others by teaching students for example how to be proud of themselves, and not feel pity for themselves for what has happened to First Nations in the past. Three teachers talked about strength, and how it is taught in their classrooms.

Alana

The first teacher talked about how she can teach her students to not feel victimized by what happened to their relatives in the past. On the opposite, she wants her students to feel proud of themselves and their culture:

Your kohkum, your mushum, your mom, your dad, somebody in your family has gone to residential school.” We have the effects of whatever the residential school did to us. So it’s still there. And we can’t just say, “Oh it’ll go away.” Or, “We gotta get over it.” But we can embrace it and say, “Okay we’ll learn, figure it out and we’ll go forward,” you know? And just figure it out in a good way. And we can’t sit here and say, “Okay you know what? I’m messed up from residential school. And I’m just going to blame that.” But if we say, “You know what? I’m going to do better and I’m going to take all those things residential school took away from our people and just celebrate our culture now and celebrate who we are in a good, positive way.” And then just reading that story to the kids it was emotional for me. And I didn’t show it but I just could feel it because my parents went to residential school. So and then acknowledging that this happened to our people. And even the day schools. The same thing. She was in day school and the same thing. All those things happened. But we can’t just sweep it under the rug. We can’t just say, “We can’t deal with this,” because they’re too young to understand. But they need to understand. They need to at least have some kind of knowledge that this happened and

that this is changing. And we're going to change it back. Not – we can't go totally back to where we were. But we can actually still embrace all those things we had to leave behind and bring them forward and just be proud of who we are and our culture and celebrate.

You know, celebrate. And we want the children to be strong.

Coreen

This teacher started talking about her idea that Cree education has to include the teaching of emotional values, and she does that by teaching her students how to be strong through the metaphor behind a tipi:

It's like the idea of holistic education I guess and it's emotional, like it's emotional values that they have to learn and like I said, in September I always start off talking about just how a tipi needs things to stand up and to be strong and so we want to be strong people and we want to be healthy people and so we have to learn to live this way so we can be strong people.

Miah

This teacher also touched on the importance of bringing the positive side from negative experiences. She could do that with the support she had to overcome the painful experiences she went through in her past. Now, she wants to be able to teach her students how to be strong and feel proud of themselves and their culture:

I remember those days. It was so strong back in my day and strength... oh my gosh. I know what strength is about, I've had so much support. I've been so lucky because I've had good people and good traditional values, why I'm here today. I have a student here that – he loves to dance, he loves his language. I think from whatever I incorporated, I think I've somehow made this student feel proud of his culture. When I was in foster

care, I was made to feel ashamed of myself. Being First Nations was not a good thing. But here, I see the glow in my students when – because I’m very positive. Like for example, the treaties. I talk about the treaties with my students and we look at them like we’re all treaty people, we are, because they sign, they shook hands and made promises so it means we’re all treaty people. But I also try and tell students you know this wasn’t all bad because what people tried to do in the past was you know try to make it good for everybody. I try not to make it bad where I’m making somebody look like they weren’t doing anything to... they weren’t being honest or whatever, no. I try and think about the past and how languages were an issue. They were a problem because translation was not really translated in the sense that First Nations wanted or else, when the settlers came in, right? But here, these students learn both languages you know, both English and Cree and it’s so empowering for them. They have knowledge of both worlds and they’re very proud of it, you know. I know through their pictures, through their writings, and how much they always want to talk, and how much they want to always discuss things, and you know how many of them put their hands up, it’s everything. Everything is so – I’ve noticed so much. They’re proud. They’re very proud of their culture you know and the good thing is their path is going to be so much better because they learn in both worlds, they’ve learned both worlds, you know and I think that I’ve guided them enough that, I’ve taught them enough as well in my grade level that they’re still going to carry what I’ve taught them and they’re still going to do really well in both worlds, you know.

Taking Actions through Hands-on Education

The next quotes connect First Nations' traditions and education through hands-on experiences. Three participants expressed how they teach their students through the hands-on education.

Alana

This teacher emphasized the importance of relating the First Nations students' hands-on experience to their traditions:

We're growing squash and beans and we planted our corn because we're planting a community garden so to give them some, to tie them to that, I talked about the Iroquois and how the Iroquois they lived a sedentary life, they lived in long houses and they, we followed the buffalo on the Plains Cree, we followed the buffalo. We didn't plant gardens but the Iroquois did so then I showed them, I actually read the story about the legend of the three sisters, so those were the like the corn, the maize, and the beans, right? And that was their, what they did. So I wanted to tie it to something Aboriginal so not just saying that "oh this is the garden we're going to plant it" but what I did is was I like "the Iroquois planted so we're going to plant like the Iroquois so we're planting a Iroquois garden" so we planted our corn, then we're going to plant our beans, and then we're going to plant our squash around the edge because the squash will give all the cover for the bugs and stuff like that. So not just planting a garden but making it traditional as well. So everything we do we bring it back to the, you know the tipi teachings. Everything is important.

Coreen

This teacher mentioned taking students out of the school to participate in traditional celebrations such as powwows, and this way they can understand the meaning of these traditions. Another experience that this teacher allowed them to live is being on the land for them to establish a relationship with it:

It's nice because it's powwow season so we've gone to a few powwows this year and I usually try to get some of them dancing in the powwow because we have regalia at our school so they're able to participate – like not even competitive – but just to go out there and just to be part of that experience. A lot of them have gone to lots of powwows before. And then we also get to, like in the Spring and the Summer we go out to the farms, we get to see animals and it's an experience, spend some time on the land, and then we have a celebration at the end of the year so it's really just like getting out in the community and every Friday we walk over to the library, the Carlyle King, so being a part of the community, seeing what's out there, connecting with other people, and being a representative.

Kalinda

This teacher talked about the effectiveness of hands-on learning for her students. In the teacher's perception, incorporating hands-on activity in her lesson plan promotes students engagement and fosters their learning process:

You definitely need to keep focused on getting your outcomes met and your, from your curriculum, whatever it is that you're teaching. And then even sort of blending and integrating subjects so it's not, it's not really, for example Language Arts, it may be Language Arts and Social Studies, them sort of together. So sort of finding ways to integrate subjects so that you can hit an outcome or outcomes that are similar. So just

trying to do double the work but in a way that would be really grabbing their attention also because, so hands on kind of learning and so really incorporating activities and lessons that are really, really draw their attention. I think that if you can find that hook for them then that's a good thing.

This chapter has summarized the responses collected from the interviews with the four participant teachers. It was noticed that the teachers used the tipi teachings to relate the content of their lesson plans to the CELs, which will be further discussed in chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter discusses the results categorized in chapter four. Additionally, the strengths and limitations of this study are presented as well. Suggestions of topics for future research are offered.

Lesson Plans that are Prepared to Integrate Indigenous Cultures and Traditions through a Cree Language and Culture Program

The teachers' discourses presented in chapter four communicated their willingness to provide an education that is inclusive, and in which their students can become the protagonists of their own learning. The teachers showed how, through their lesson plans, students benefitted from learning content embedded in their traditions. The teachers that participated in this study make use of the tipi teachings, that are related to Cultural Essential Learnings (CELs), to foster Indigenous cultures and traditions in their classrooms.

It is fundamental to highlight that the teachers' sharing communicate their holistic approach to life as it is reflected in their educational practices. These teachers' holistic approaches to knowledge and educational practices reflect a fundamental characteristic of Indigenous epistemologies. The incorporation of tipi teachings that are related to CELs into the teachers' lesson plans go beyond the purpose of only teaching content based on subjects. For instance, more than teaching literacy, these teachers' lesson plans have the goal of transforming standardized pedagogies into sustaining, revitalizing ones. These professionals understand an ethical obligation to be an active part of the reconciliation and healing process of the First Nations People of Canada.

Throughout the teachers' answers, the focus on teaching Cree values and traditions and not on creating strategies for students to just learn how to read and write can be observed. As

McCarty and Lee (2014) affirmed, a culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy (CSRP) is a way of approaching Indigenous education in a culturally responsive manner as it incorporates their cultural experiences. For the CSRP to happen in classrooms, the Indigenous holistic elements (spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual) must be present (McCarty & Lee, 2014).

The teachers presented an education that is against the Eurocentric mainstream values and traditions. As affirmed by Battiste (2013), some modern educational curricula in Canada are still not reflective of Indigenous knowledge and culture. However, the participants of this study expressed an education that reflects Indigenous knowledge and traditions. Actively bringing their cultural background to the classroom is their way of resisting the loss of their traditions, language and ways of living. Before the residential schools period, education in Indigenous communities was transmitted orally by Elders, and was an ongoing process that focused on the communities and not on the individuals (Haig-Brown, 1988). However, due to the residential schools' repressive practices, policies, and the political objectives of the education provided, Indigenous peoples progressively were deprived of their traditions, languages and identities (Haig-Brown, 1988). Europeans wanted to Christianise and civilize First Nations according to their own values and traditions to assure the Eurocentric hegemony in the territory they were newly occupying (Haig-Brown, 1988).

Even though educational practices and policies in Canada still tend to perpetuate European knowledge in its curriculum, there is recognition that Indigenous knowledge, practices and culture in general are equally as important (Battiste 2013). The teachers that participated in this study showed that it possible to offer an education based on Indigenous cultures and respect Indigenous epistemologies. For example, the teachers mentioned how important it is for them to help their students feel proud of themselves and build up their identities by accepting the validity

and fundamental importance of their cultural backgrounds. By helping the students feel proud of themselves and build up their identities, the teachers can collaborate with the healing process of Cree people, since accepting the validity and legitimacy of their cultural background can increase the students' self-esteem (Cherubini & Hodson, 2008). The authors affirmed that self-esteem is necessary for building trust among First Nations and also between Indigenous peoples and other members of Canadian society.

The first cultural element presented in chapter four was the importance of building positive and trustful relationships among students. Relationships are described as part of the CELs and tipi teachings that are followed by the participating teachers. The four participants all highlighted how building relationships are taught in their classrooms. For instance, more than one teacher described how they have incorporated weekly talking circles in the classroom to foster bonding, understanding and respect among the students. Another teacher exemplified how she exercised culturally responsive practices, mentioning that she promotes community feasts in the school to create connections among students and community members.

Having Cree people from the students' communities, such as Elders, brought to school was described as another strategy to build relationships with the students. Besides relationship building, the presence of people from the First Nations communities in the school setting provides role models for students. Every student in the school is given the opportunity to find in the persons of the Elder and other community members valid and legitimate figures that they can identify with and learn from, which in turn might help students to develop their own cultural identities (Wilson, 1996). Additionally, having Cree community members in the school teaches students the implications of the shift in the educational paradigm in motion in Canada, in which Cree students, their families and cultures are welcomed in the school and within Canadian

society, instead of being repressed or shamed for coming from a different ethnic background (Cherubini & Hodson, 2008).

As described by Goulet and Goulet (2014), for Indigenous peoples, the relationships with other members of their communities, the land, and nature itself are the basis of their learning process. Antone (2003) connected relationships with Indigenous literacy. The author explained that literacy becomes meaningful for Indigenous peoples when they can see its purpose and understand how it can connect them with their communities. Thus, when teachers bring a pedagogy that promotes close and heartfelt relationships with and among First Nations students into their classrooms, teachers are strengthening Indigenous values and adopting their perspective of being in the world (Goulet & Goulet, 2014).

Goulet and Goulet (2014) affirmed that the root of Indigenous learning processes is based on relationships built within the tribe, with other creatures, with their land, and with the spirit. By developing relationships through First Nations cultural perspectives, teachers can help their students feel valued and included, which might have a positive impact on Indigenous academic lives (Ladson-Billing, 1995). Through the establishment of solid and positive relationships, values such as respect, obedience, humility, sharing, ultimate protection, thankfulness, strength and love, which are cultural elements of CELs and tipi teachings, are taught. By building positive relationships with teachers and among themselves, Indigenous students can experience the values of respect and reciprocity (Goulet & Goulet, 2014).

Honouring people's basic rights, such as respect, is part of Cree culture, and the teachers teach it to their students. Through sharing circles, as mentioned by some of the teachers interviewed in this study, respect is taught. Listening when others are talking, learning to take turns during conversation and say nice things to others are ways of showing respect. Respecting

protocols in ceremonies was also described by one teacher as a way to teach students how to be respectful towards social rules. Respect within Cree culture is related to the value of each member of the community.

By being obedient and learning how to become good listeners, First Nations students might realize that most of their learning processes come from an oral tradition (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009). Through listening to Elders and knowledge keepers' stories by sitting and visiting with them, children understand that their cultures are ways of living (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009). One teacher mentioned practicing obedience in the sharing circles. The assumptions underlying such practices for her is that, by learning how to be good listeners during the sharing circles, students can generalize their learned listening skills and use them in other contexts.

Another teacher talked about teaching obedience through videos and games. From her perception, the deep meaning of obedience can become more concrete and facilitate students' comprehension by utilizing videos and games with them. Another teacher focused on the importance of telling stories to students in their language. This participant valued the importance of having students sit and learn how to be obedient and able to listen to Cree values as they are passed on through stories in their language. As Savage et al. (2011) affirmed, respecting First Nations cultures by teaching their values through their languages has the potential to make a difference in First Nations lives as students and citizens.

The practice of being humble in the students' relationships with others, especially Elders and the Creator, was emphasized by some of the teachers. Teaching students how to be respectful allowed them to learn to listen those who have more life experience. Being humble can have the same positive effect in students' academic lives. In an academic context, it is

necessary to practice humility to listen and learn from those who might know more than you because of their numbers of years of professional experience. However, the practice of humility is not exclusive to students. The Cree teachers also practiced humility and consider it essential in their own professions. For example, the teachers consult with Elders and knowledge keepers whenever they need to learn from someone with more experience. After consulting and learning with them, those teachers can pass their knowledge onto the students, who also need to be humble to receive it.

Moreover, humility in Cree culture has various aspects and implications that go beyond the individual level. Being humble for Cree people also means that teachers and students need others from the same community to learn about their traditions and cultures. As Leavitt (1994) highlighted, education empowers learners as members of a community, and not only as individuals who want to strive for autonomy.

Giving and receiving through the learning to share is another fundamental value of Cree culture. In the school the teachers associate giving and receiving with knowledge sharing. Other members of First Nations cultures, knowledge keepers, school staff and Elders go to the classrooms and share their knowledge on Indigenous cultures and languages with the students. Sharing First Nations' knowledge, most of the time, is done through oral stories and hands-on teaching.

McInstosh et al. (2011) affirmed that the incorporation of Indigenous approaches to learning promotes cultural responsiveness. For example, inviting Elders to tell First Nations' stories using their languages can develop fluency and enhance self-esteem and cultural identity among First Nations students. Goulet and Goulet (2014) highlight that the inclusion of Indigenous languages in curricula and lesson plans can capture the true meanings of Indigenous

words connected to their cultures. As these authors showed, some Indigenous words, when translated into English, lose their real meanings, which are directly connected to their cultures. For instance, words such as sun, lands, plants, rocks, and animals are alive and carry spiritual meanings in First Nations cultures, and they lose this essence when translated to English, in which those words have different cultural representations (Goulet and Goulet, 2014).

In the current study participating teachers mentioned the four dimensions of Cree culture (mental, emotional, physical and spiritual aspects) that were under the umbrella of ultimate protection in the CELs. These four dimensions are related to the care of the spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual dimensions of Cree culture. Antone (2003) emphasized that language plays a major role in First Nations education when connected not only to academics, but also their cultural elements such as spirituality. Furthermore, the wholeness approach that corresponds to First Nations cultures has to be incorporated when teaching their languages. The mental, emotional, physical and spiritual aspects that are presented in the First Nations relationships to the Creator and their environments represent their literacy.

The teachers expressed the necessity and importance of practices that promote a balanced and holistic health in their students' education. Through the sharing circles, students can talk about what bothers or hurts them if they feel comfortable to do that. By doing that, they would be taking care of their emotional aspect. The students' body break, which is called powwow sweat, besides being related to their traditions, also promotes physical health. Smudging is another Cree cultural element that is done in the school, and it contains medicinal properties for Indigenous peoples.

The goal of the teachers appears to be offering a positive and supportive environment in the school for the students who might have been experiencing intergenerational trauma due to the

fact that their parents went to residential schools. Most of the time, Cree students, as mentioned by some of the teachers, come to the school with a background of family issues such as breakdowns and addictions.

The teachers want to teach their students how to be loved and be proud of who they are. As some of the teachers mentioned, they are dealing with many children that are not being raised by their parents. These parents do not know how to parent as they did not have their families in their own lives because their parents were in residential schools. One of the teachers reinforced the importance of using the medicine wheel which is the physical, the emotional, the mental, and the spiritual aspects of Cree culture in her classes such as literacy. For this teacher, her students need to understand the concept of each cultural element to maintain positivity in their lives.

The CELs touch on the spiritual aspect of First Nations traditions. First Nations cultures are essentially spiritual cultures (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009). Besides mentioned as part of the First Nations holistic approach, the sacred element is displayed by some of the teachers through teaching their students how to be thankful to others, the Creator, and Mother Earth. Antone (2003) stated the importance of connecting the sacred knowledge of Indigenous students to their languages as a way to strengthen their cultural identities. By sending prayers in ceremonies, students can be thankful to the Creator for all they have in their lives, and approach the sacred aspect of their cultures. Being thankful as delineated by the CELs is the First Nations' capacity to give thanks for all the kind things others, and the Creator offer to them (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009).

Hands-on experience in the school also expresses way of learning. Some of the teachers mentioned the Indigenous hands-on education in our conversation. By experiencing what they are learning, students can integrate the content into their traditions. The understanding of cultural

meanings behind some of the things they do in the school, such as taking care of a community garden and participating in traditional celebrations, can turn these activities to become more effective and meaningful for students.

In the present study, one teacher indicated that when the students are planting squash, beans, and corn in the community garden, they learn about their Indigenous traditions such as those from the Iroquois, who lived in longhouses on the Plains. The students also listen to the story told by their teacher about the legend of the three sisters, the corn, the maize, and the beans that are part of First Nations traditions. Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005) affirmed that First Nations people acquire their knowledge when they experience it in the natural world. The authors claimed that Indigenous knowledge, to be comprehended, needs to be tested in their everyday environments. Indigenous students can better learn their lessons if they are grounded in First Nations epistemologies such as hands-on education (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005).

Learning how to become strong by being patient and accepting their difficulties is under the umbrella of CELs and it is taught by some of the teachers. These teachers want their students to overcome what happened to their relatives in the past. They teach their students to not feel little about themselves as First Nations. On the contrary, the teachers wanted their students to feel proud of themselves and their culture. Teaching them how to deal with resentment that might come from their families due to what they went through in the residential schools could help them value the positive side of negative experiences.

Using the critical pedagogy of Freire (1968), Smith and McLaren (2010) affirmed that Freire's theory could be thought of as a tool to promote a decolonizing pedagogy by seeking to consider and revitalize Indigenous epistemologies in classrooms. The authors claimed that an education that is emancipatory for minority groups, such as Indigenous peoples, should be

promoted and their own traditional elements must be used as part of their education. Indigenous peoples should collaborate with the dominant society by planning their own education and become active agents in writing their own histories and in reinventing a different narrative.

Through the presentation and interpretation of the data, it could be noticed how the participant teachers incorporate Cree approaches into their lesson plans. The approaches were not called CELs by teachers, but are related to them. By respecting and honouring Cree culture through the incorporation of Cree knowledge in their lesson plans, the participant teachers promoted cultural responsiveness in their classrooms. Furthermore, the participant teachers encouraged and allowed their students to revitalize their language in the classrooms.

Sterzuk (2010) argued that teaching Indigenous content using English reinforces the status quo by implying that the English language is common and preferred, which ends up imposing the ideology of British imperialism and homogenizing all cultures. However, when teachers provide students with access to Cree language, it might reverse the standardization of English and, furthermore, bring about the end of discrimination in schools. The teachers in this study showed that they honour Cree culture, heritage, experiences, and language in their classrooms and enhanced their students' self-esteem and cultural identities.

Conclusion

Based on my research questions, which had the goal to investigate what examples of First Nations Cultural Essential Learnings (CELs) appear in the repertoires of the Cree teachers who instruct literacy classes in an urban school setting and if there are other elements of First Nations values and culture that emerge in their teaching, it was concluded that, in the perception of the participant teachers, they have incorporated Cree traditions, values, and epistemologies in their

lesson plans. The First Nations' traditions, values, and epistemologies are based on the tipi teachings and related to CELs. The main components related to CELs according to Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre were presented and discussed by the participant teachers through semi-structured interviews. Thus, the participant teachers' practices encompass a pedagogy perceived as culturally responsive.

Cree traditions and values such as building relationships, teaching respect, sharing, obedience, humility, thankfulness, love, ultimate protection and strength, and also care for their holistic approach, were present in the teachers' speeches. It could be noticed that the teachers' answers are embedded with First Nations' traditions and values, which are reflected in their daily practices.

The teachers explained some of the methods used in their practice to teach Cree values and traditions. For instance, the importance of a talking circle in the classrooms as a way to teach how to build relationships was discussed. The talking circle, and other strategies were also used as a way of teaching values such as respect, obedience, sharing, and ultimate protection.

Another pedagogical strategy highlighted by the teachers was the participation of Elders to share with the students stories grounded in values and traditions using Cree language. Hands-on education such as taking care of the school community garden and participation in traditional ceremonies were also pointed as possible activities to teach First Nations cultures. Regardless of the specific strategy used, the spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical aspects were all considered in the teachers' speeches and their reflection about their classrooms activities.

It is important to highlight that the incorporation of tipi teachings that are related to CELs into the teachers' lesson plans surpasses the purpose of only teaching content-based subjects. For instance, more than teaching literacy, these teachers' lesson plans have the goal of transforming

standardized pedagogies into sustaining, revitalizing ones and promote healing among Cree students.

Strengths and Implications

Having First Nations teachers participating in this research is a strength of this study. First Nations teachers provided a first hand source in the investigation of how Indigenous pedagogies have been incorporated in lesson plans. Furthermore, the participants explained how they translate their values and traditions into their lesson plans and classrooms through culturally meaningful and responsive practices. Additionally, the participants' comprehension of First Nations values and traditions influenced their professional practice as teachers.

Equally, interviewing First Nation teachers might have helped the participants to ponder their professional goals and evaluate the effectiveness of their pedagogical practices in promoting student success. In addition, giving participants an opportunity to reflect on their daily classroom experiences might have increased their desire to continue making their lesson plans inclusive of First Nations values and traditions.

Another strength of this study is that the interpretation of the data might be used to support other schools and grades, as an example of how to incorporate First Nations traditions and values into lesson plans. Not only First Nations teachers, but also teachers from other ethnic groups can make use of Indigenous values and traditions by understanding how to use them, and being aware of their importance in their students' lives. Moreover, any student, regardless of their cultural background, can benefit from teachers respecting and honoring First Nation values and traditions in classroom daily practices. Understanding the importance of Indigenous cultures to Canada might foster a cultural understanding that values diversity, respect and inclusion of other people within Canadian society.

Another strength of this study was how the ethical issues were handled. The semi-structured interviews were revised by an Elder to verify if they were culturally bounded and respectful, since I have another cultural background rather than being First Nations. After the transcription of the interviews, the participants had the opportunity to review the written copy and verify the validity of their answers.

It is also important to mention that this research substantially contributed to my professional development. For anyone whose goal is to become a registered psychologist in Canada, and work as a counsellor, it is fundamental to acquire knowledge of First Nations cultures. First Nations are an essential part of Canadian society. Therefore, culturally responsive counsellors have an ethical obligation to honour and respect First Nations traditions and values.

Finally, the research topic itself can be considered as a strength of this study, since few studies have investigated how elementary First Nations teachers who instruct literacy classes comprehend and develop First Nations values and traditions in their classroom practices.

Suggestions for Future Research

In terms of suggestions for future research in the area of First Nations' education, it would be beneficial for Indigenous students if researchers could further explore the benefits for those students in their school lives when they feel that First Nations cultures are being incorporated in their education process. Other Indigenous cultural backgrounds such as Inuit and Metis could be used to have a deeper understanding of how their values and traditions are being incorporated into lesson plans and classrooms.

Another suggestion for future research would be including not only Cree or First Nations teachers, but also teachers with different cultural backgrounds in the exploration of if, and how,

teachers incorporate Indigenous pedagogies, traditions and values into their lesson plans and classroom activities for indigenous and non-indigenous students.

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APPENDIX A

Definitions of some components that are related to Cultural Essential Learnings (CELs) according to First Nations peoples (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009):

Relationship (Kinship): “Our family is important to us. This includes our parents, our brothers and sisters who love us and give us roots; the roots that tie us to life blood of the earth. It also includes extended family – grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins and their-in-laws and children. These are also our brothers and sisters and they give us a sense of belonging to the community.” (p. 38)

Respect (values): “We must give honour to our Elders and fellow students and the strangers that come to visit our community. We must honour other people’s basic rights.” (p. 38)

Sharing: “We learn to be part of the family by helping in providing food or other basic needs. This is sharing responsibilities in order to enjoy them.” (p. 38)

Ultimate protection: “The ultimate responsibility to achieve is, “health for a balanced caring for the body, mind, emotions and the spirit of the individual, the family, the community and the nation.” (p. 39)

Love: “If we are to live in harmony we must accept one another as we are and to accept others who are not in our circle. Love means to be kind and good to one another.” (p. 38)

Obedience: “We learn by listening to traditional stories; by listening to our parents or guardians, our fellow students and our teachers. We learn by their behaviours and reminders so that we know what is right and what is wrong.” (p. 38)

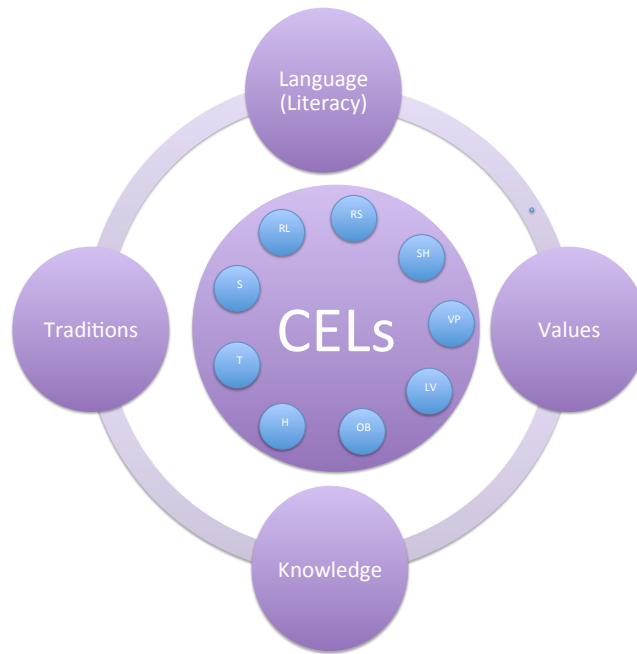
Humility: “We are not above or below others in the circle of life. We feel humbled when we understand our relationship with Creation. We are so small compared to the majestic expanse of Creation, “we are just a strand in the web of life”, and we respect and value life.” (p. 38)

Thankfulness: “We learn to give thanks for all the kind things others do for us and for the Creator’s bounty, that we are privileged to share with others in the spirit of love.” (p. 38)

Strength: “We must learn to be patient in times of trouble and not to complain but to endure and show understanding. We must accept difficulties and tragedies so that we may give others strength to accept their own difficulties and tragedies.” (p. 39).

APPENDIX B

Conceptual framework adapted from the literature



APPENDIX C

Questions for the Semi-structured Interview:

Part I: Building up a trustful relationship

1. I will introduce myself and I will talk a little bit about the research
2. Could you tell me about yourself (e.g., place of birth, family, background)?
3. How long have you been a teacher?
4. Why have you decided to be a teacher?
5. Have you noticed changes in the education of First Nations children since you started?
What about in your teaching style?
6. Could you tell me a little bit about this school (e.g., student demographics including the number of students, ethnicity)?

Part II: Understanding teachers' practices that relate to First Nations' traditions and values based on Cultural Essential Learnings (CELs)

1. What is your educational philosophy of Indigenous education? What guides/orients your educational view(s), philosophy and professional values?
2. Could you relate some of those values you have just told me to the CELs ones? (see the appendix)
3. Could you give me some examples of how you have incorporated CELs into your lesson plans for literacy classes.

4. Could you tell me some stories of how you have incorporated the CELs into your lesson plans? How did the students feel?
5. Could you tell me some stories of how you have incorporated First languages into your lesson plans? What First Nations languages or dialects are they? What impact have you noticed in your students after teaching them First Nations languages?
6. Were there any barriers in bringing the teaching of First Nations languages into the classroom?
7. Do you feel supported by your school when it comes to incorporate First Nations values and traditions into lesson plans?
8. What educational future do you see for First Nations children?

APPENDIX D
Informed Consent Form

Date:

Participant Name:

Research title: “Identifying the Cultural Essential Learnings (CELs) used in literacy classes for elementary students in public schools of Saskatoon”

Researchers:

Dr. Pei-Ying Lin (Supervisor)

Assistant professor from the department of Ed Psych and Special Education in the University of Saskatchewan

Email: pei-ying.lin@usask.ca

Phone: (306) 966-5265

Juliana Baiocchi

Email: jub952@mail.usask.ca

Phone: (306) 261-9605

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: The participant will answer open-ended questions intend to explore without following a rigid format of questioning. Consisting of thirteen to fifteen questions, the interviews are expected to be concluded within one hour in one single session for each participant. Reflexive journals will be used in the process of data

collection in the interest of trustworthiness. After each interview with the teachers, thoughts, feelings, and reactions that appear during the data collection will be recorded in a journal.

Incentive: As an incentive for participating in the interview, each participant will get \$30 dollars.

Risks and Discomforts: The participants might feel a little bit of discomfort by sharing their teaching experiences. The interview will be recorded, but the participant may request that the audio-recorder be turned off at any time during the interview. After transcribing the interviews, they will be sent to the participants to be double-checked and released for the data analysis. The participants will have the right to correct the transcription if they think it not accurate, and they also have the right to refuse the release of the transcriptions.

Social importance of this research: In terms of the significance of this study, First Nations teachers might reflect on their pedagogical strategies and how they deliver content to students. First Nations teachers will have the opportunity to think and make connections between CELs and other components of their daily curriculum. This reflection could lead to the process of the actualization of their lesson plans in order to make them more culturally bound in First Nations values and traditions. Not only First Nations teachers will benefit from this study, but also other elementary teachers can make use of the reflections and the results of this research.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the treatment you may be receiving, nor the nature of your relationship with the where you work either now, or in the future.

Withdrawal from the Study: You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular

questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, where you work, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible. Your right to withdraw data from the study will apply until the end of the data analysis, which will be also double-checked for you before the thesis defense. After this, it is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your data.

Confidentiality: All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. In terms of the limits of confidentiality, they will be restricted to the context, where individual participants could be identified because of the nature or size of the sample or because of their relationship with the researcher. There will also be the limits due to selection, in which procedures for recruiting or selecting participants may compromise the confidentiality of participants (e.g. participants are referred to the study by a person outside the research team). I will record the interview through a digital device, and after it will be transcribed by the SSRL professionals. These professionals are from the Social Science Research Laboratories (SSRL), and they will sign a confidentiality agreement, in which they cannot share any transcribed information with any one. After the transcriptions, the interviews will be revised by the researchers and participants in order to be released for the data analysis. The participants will have the right to correct the transcription if they think it not accurate, and they also have the right to refuse the release of the transcriptions. As I do not personally have a First Nations background, the interpretation of the data could be affected. To address this concern, a double-checking strategy will be used. After interpreting the data, the First Nations teachers will be invited once again to review the results. The results will be revised based on participating

teachers' feedback and suggestions. Your data will be safely protected on my computer and my supervisor's through a file password for five years. After five years, the data will be shredded.

Questions About the Research? This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office ethics.office@usask.ca (306) 966-2975. Out of town participants may call toll free (888) 966-2975. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I _____, consent to participate in Identifying the Cultural Essential Learnings (CELs) used in literacy classes for elementary students in public schools of Saskatoon conducted by Juliana Baiocchi. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX E

Cover Letter for teachers

As a teacher, you are being invited to participate in the research entitled “Identifying the Cultural Essential Learnings (CELs) used in literacy classes for elementary students in public schools of Saskatoon”

Date:

Participant Name:

Researchers:

Dr. Pei-Ying Lin (Supervisor)

Assistant professor from the department of Ed Psych and Special Education in the University of Saskatchewan

Email: pei-ying.lin@usask.ca

Phone: (306) 966-5265

Juliana Baiocchi

Email: jub952@mail.usask.ca

Phone: (306) 261-9605

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this research is to understand how First Nations teachers from elementary schools who instruct literacy classes in Saskatoon comprehend and promote elements from Cultural Essential Learnings (CELs), and other First Nations traditions and values that those teachers might also develop on their lesson plans, in order to work

successfully not only with First Nations students, but also with all students that might benefit from a culturally sustaining pedagogy.

Social importance of this research: In terms of the significance of this study, First Nations teachers might reflect on their pedagogical strategies and how they deliver content to students. First Nations teachers will have the opportunity to think and make connections between CELs and other components of their daily curriculum. This reflection could lead to the process of the actualization of their lesson plans in order to make them more culturally bound in First Nations values and traditions. Not only First Nations teachers will benefit from this study, but also other elementary teachers can make use of the reflections and the results of this research.

How trustworthiness will be established: Some verification strategies will be employed during the collection and analysis of the data. A thick description will be used, not only as a strategy of trustworthiness, but also as a way of reporting and interpreting the data. As Hays & Singh (2011) describe, a thick description is a very detailed, informative, reflective, and comprehensive way of reporting the data. Beyond the basic facts, feelings, observations, ethical and cultural implications, data analysis steps, personal biases, participants recruitment, data collection procedures through interviews and observations, theoretical framework, and pertinent notes from a journal will be reported.

How potential ethical issues will be maintained: With regard to ethical issues, some cultural implications could potentially arise during this research, including challenges associated with interacting with First Nations teachers who have their own cultures and worldviews which are vastly different from my own. The three principles described in the guidelines for research with Indigenous peoples will be considered in this study (Panel on Research Ethics, 2015). The three principles include: (1) the respect for persons (assured through the free and informed ongoing

consent of participant), (2) concern for welfare (research will not interfere with Indigenous capacity to maintain their cultures, languages and identities), and (3) justice (data and results benefits will be shared, and dissemination of information will have to be previously consented).

Prior to the interviews, as a way to ensure that the interview questions are unobjectionable in light of First Nations traditions and values, professors and pre-service teachers from the Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP) of the University of Saskatchewan will be consulted.

Confirming that the interview questions for the First Nations teachers will be respectful to their cultures and traditions is critically important. The language of the questions should be sensitive to First Nations cultures, thus at least one Elder in Saskatoon, recommended by professors or pre-service teachers from the ITEP, will be contacted.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: The participant will answer open-ended questions intend to explore without following a rigid format of questioning. Consisting of thirteen to fifteen questions, the interviews are expected to be concluded within one hour in one single session for each participant. Reflexive journals will be used in the process of data collection in the interest of trustworthiness. After each interview with the teachers, thoughts, feelings, and reactions that appear during the data collection will be recorded in a journal.

Incentive: As an incentive for participating in the interview, each participant will get \$30 dollars.

Risks and Discomforts: The participants might feel a little bit of discomfort by sharing their teaching experiences.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the

treatment you may be receiving, nor the nature of your relationship with the where you work either now, or in the future.

Withdrawal from the Study: You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, where you work, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

Confidentiality: All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. I will record the interview through a digital device, and after it will be transcribed by the SSRL professionals. These professionals are from the Social Science Research Laboratories (SSRL), and they will sign a confidentiality agreement, in which they cannot share any transcribed information with any one. After the transcriptions, the interviews will be revised by the researchers and participants in order to be released for the data analysis. The participants will have the right to correct the transcription if they think it not accurate, and they also have the right to refuse the release of the transcriptions. As I do not personally have a First Nations background, the interpretation of the data could be affected. To address this concern, a double-checking strategy will be used. After interpreting the data, the First Nations teachers will be invited once again to review the results. The results will be revised based on participating teachers' feedback and suggestions. Your data will be safely protected on my computer and my supervisor's through a file password for five years. After five years, the data will be shredded.

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Juliana Baiochi either by telephone at (306) 261-9605, or by e-mail jub952@mail.usask.ca. This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of Saskatchewan's Ethics Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines.

This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office ethics.office@usask.ca (306) 966-2975. Out of town participants may call toll free (888) 966-2975.

APPENDIX F

Payment Confirmation Form

I _____,

Acknowledge that I have received payment of \$30 Canadian dollars for my participation in the research **“Identifying the Cultural Essential Learnings (CELs) used in literacy classes for elementary students in public schools of Saskatoon”** from the student-researcher, Juliana Baiochi.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Student-Researcher

Date

APPENDIX G

Research Ethics Boards (Behavioural and Biomedical)

TRANSCRIPT RELEASE FORM

Title: “Identifying the Cultural Essential Learnings (CELs) used in literacy classes for elementary students in public schools of Saskatoon”

I, _____, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interview in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview with Juliana Baiochi. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Juliana Baiochi to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Signature of researcher

APPENDIX H

“The Cree people use 15 poles to make the structure of the tipi. For every pole in that tipi, there is a teaching. So there are 15 teachings that hold up the tipi. The poles also teach us that no matter what version of the Great Spirit we believe in, we still go to the same Creator from those many directions and belief systems; we just have different journeys to get there. And where the poles come out together at the top, it’s like they’re creating a nest (University of Saskatchewan, n.d., p.01).”

Tipi Poles (University of Saskatchewan, n.d.):

Obedience: “Obedience means accepting guidance and wisdom from outside of ourselves, using our ears before our mouth. We learn by listening to traditional stories, by listening to our parents or guardians, our fellow students and our teachers. We learn by their behaviors and reminders, so that we know what is right and what is wrong (p.01).”

Respect: “Respect means giving honor to our Elders and fellow students, to the strangers that come to visit our community, and to all of life. We must honor the basic rights of all others (p.01).”

Humility: “We are not above or below others in the circle of life. We feel humbled when we understand our relationship with Creation. We are so small compared to the majestic expanse of Creation, just a “strand in the web of life.” Understanding this helps us to respect and value life (p.01).”

Happiness: “After the tripod is up, the fourth pole completes your doorway. This fourth pole teaches us happiness. We must show some enthusiasm to encourage others. Our good actions will make our ancestors happy in the next world. This is how we share happiness (p.01).”

Love: “If we are to live in harmony we must accept one another as we are, and accept others

who are not in our circle. Love means to be good and kind to one another and to our selves (p.01).”

Faith: “We must learn to believe and trust others, to believe in a power greater than ourselves, whom we worship and who gives us strength to be a worthy member of the human race. To sustain our spirituality, we need to walk it every day. Not just sometimes, but every day. It’s not just once a week; it’s your life (p.01).”

Kinship: “Our family is important to us. This includes our parents, brothers and sisters, who love us and give us roots that tie us to the lifeblood of the earth. It also includes extended family: grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, and their in-laws and children. They are also our brothers and sisters and give us a sense of belonging to a community (p.01).”

Cleanliness: “Today when we talk about cleanliness, most people think hygiene, and that’s very important. But years ago, when old people talked about cleanliness, they meant spiritual cleanliness. When I used to sit with the old Kookums in their tipis, spiritually, they were so powerfully clean. Clean thoughts come from a clean mind and this comes from our spirituality. With a clean mind and sense of peace within we learn not to inflict ills on others. Good health habits also reflect a clean mind (p.01).”

Thankfulness: “We learn to give thanks: to always be thankful for the Creator’s bounty, which we are privileged to share with others, and for all the kind things others do for us (p.01).”

Sharing: “We learn to be part of a family and community by helping with the provisions of food and other basic needs. Through the sharing of responsibilities we learn the value of working together and enjoying the fruits of our labor (p.01).”

Strength: “We are not talking about physical strength, but spiritual strength. That was instilled in us when we were young people through fasting. We must learn to be patient in times of

trouble and not to complain but to endure and show understanding. We must accept difficulties and tragedies so that we may give others strength to accept their own difficulties and tragedies (p.01).”

Good Child Rearing: “Children are gifts from the Creator. We are responsible for their wellbeing, spiritually, emotionally, physically, and intellectually, since they are blessed with the gift of representing the continuing circle of life, which we perceive to be the Creator’s will (p.01).”

Hope: “We must look forward to moving toward good things. We need to have a sense that the seeds we are planting will bear fruit for our children, families and communities (p.01).”

Ultimate Protection: “This is the ultimate responsibility to achieve the balance and well being of the body, mind, emotions and spirit for the individual, the family, the community and the nation (p.01).”

Control Flaps: “The control flaps on a tipi teach that we are all connected by relationship and that we depend on each other. Having respect for and understanding this connection creates and controls harmony and balance in the circle of life. When we don’t know how to use the flaps, it gets all smoky inside the tipi, and you can’t see, which is like life – because if we can’t live in balance, we can’t see clearly where we’re going (p.01).”